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(Thank you, Tammy!)

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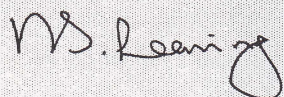
Editorial Letters

The first thing you will have noticed about this issue is the new look cover and Realms banner which Danny May has created for us, and the next is the new cover price. Hope you appreciate both changes!

You've probably heard all of this before, but the increase in cover price is our first since 1992 and really has been forced upon us by increased production costs... and Colin needing new wheels for his roller-blades, Karen wanting to feed the kids, blah, blah, blah... but hopefully you'll also recognise that due to our policy of bringing you entertaining, innovative ideas and useful source material for your games that \$6.00 is really not that much to pay every two months for a role-playing supplement the quality of Australian Realms.

Inside this issue you'll find more of what makes us great: namely ten uninterrupted pages of Unae adventure and source material, six pages of SolSpace deep space Cyberpunk action, plus source articles for Vampire: The Masquerade and Castle Falkenstein and a brilliant how to for referees who might be stuck for ideas - "Legend, Myths & Superstition". More gold medal winners than the in the Olympics!

Speaking of the Olympics, if the broadcasters were competing for medals the Channel 7 team from Australia would be bottom of the count. Every non-Gold performance by our athletes seems to be backed up by these lame brains with an excuse. Hey, wake up you guys, these are the top athletes in the world... getting in is a magnificent achievement, making the finals of an event is heroic, and winning any colour medal is super-human. Let's be excited by the effort and enjoy the victories, but stop the over-emphasis on winning.



Nick Leaning

John Baillie
Wishart QLD

Dear Nick,

Briefly, I would like to provide a few comments. I am impressed with the quality of your magazine, and find the content to be informative, entertaining and relevant, as well as catering to a reasonably broad variety of roleplayers/wargamers. Some gaming magazines tend to "crap on" a little too much, which is just a matter of personal taste I suppose. But, having been involved with the organising of conventions in Brisbane (including Briscon) for several years, as well as being involved in the writing, editing and production of several amateur magazines/newzines at a gaming club level, I can appreciate the work and time that goes into the production of a quality product, gaining world-wide distribution. To all at Australian Realms, I congratulate you on your efforts and wish you well for the future.

John, I know there are a lot of good people like you working hard for the hobby in clubs and conventions around the world and reading the flames that fly around on the 'net there is precious little appreciation of your efforts. Take a pat on the back from us at Australian Realms, which is the least we can do after the kind words you directed at us.

Matthew Legge
via Internet

Hello Nick,

I just found your web site using the address in the latest edition of Realms. My initial impression was that it had a professional feel to it and was fairly well presented. However, compared to the paper magazine it felt like it was lacking some indefinable quality that would make me jump up and take notice. Perhaps it has to do with the medium on which it is presented (ie. waiting for a new screen to download) or the relative sparseness of art work and different layout which would normally help set the mood. I suppose I still prefer to hold something tangible in my hand rather than get square eyes reading a computer screen.

It is only a suggestion, and you may have already considered it, but next time you update the web site you may also want to include your writers guidelines and a note about submitting documents via email or something similar.

I have enjoyed reading the mag and I am anxious to give the Unae book a look. My current favourite set of articles are the SolSpace series and the A-Team comic (I know, you haven't printed it in a while now, but it is still a favourite).

Keep up the good work.

Matthew, we took your suggestion on board and have now included a file of our writer's guidelines that people can grab off the web site. We will also be working harder on the home page to give it the friendly feel and usefulness of the paper version of the magazine. One of the balances that must be struck, however, is between graphic intensity and the time such files take our visitors to read into their web browsers.

Sorry about the A-Team but maybe there is some good news for Mango and Wilson fans on the horizon. SolSpace is gaining momentum with an adventure in this issue to drag players kicking and screaming into the setting. And the Unae book - The Wair-Rae Chronicles: Book 1 - is currently being typeset ready for its August release. This is a really exciting project for the Realms team and I'm convinced that Unae fans will be blown away by the work Colin has put into this brilliant book. Eager readers can advance order the book using the mail order form elsewhere in this issue.

Mada Ttihw
Morley, WA

Dear Realms,

I want to congratulate you on Unae. This is the best campaign world I have ever adventured in and it makes me wonder why there are not more Australian games available. Why do we have to put up with expensive trash from overseas?

Mada, (is that your real name?). Um, we don't know? Why do you put up with it when you can buy the Unae sourcebook due out in August? (Wink).

Via Email

nicklean@perth.dialix.oz.au

World Wide Web

<http://www.iinet.net.au/~expolrealms.html>

YESTERDAY

The elves took Serhaem

TODAY

They stormed Ossard

TOMORROW

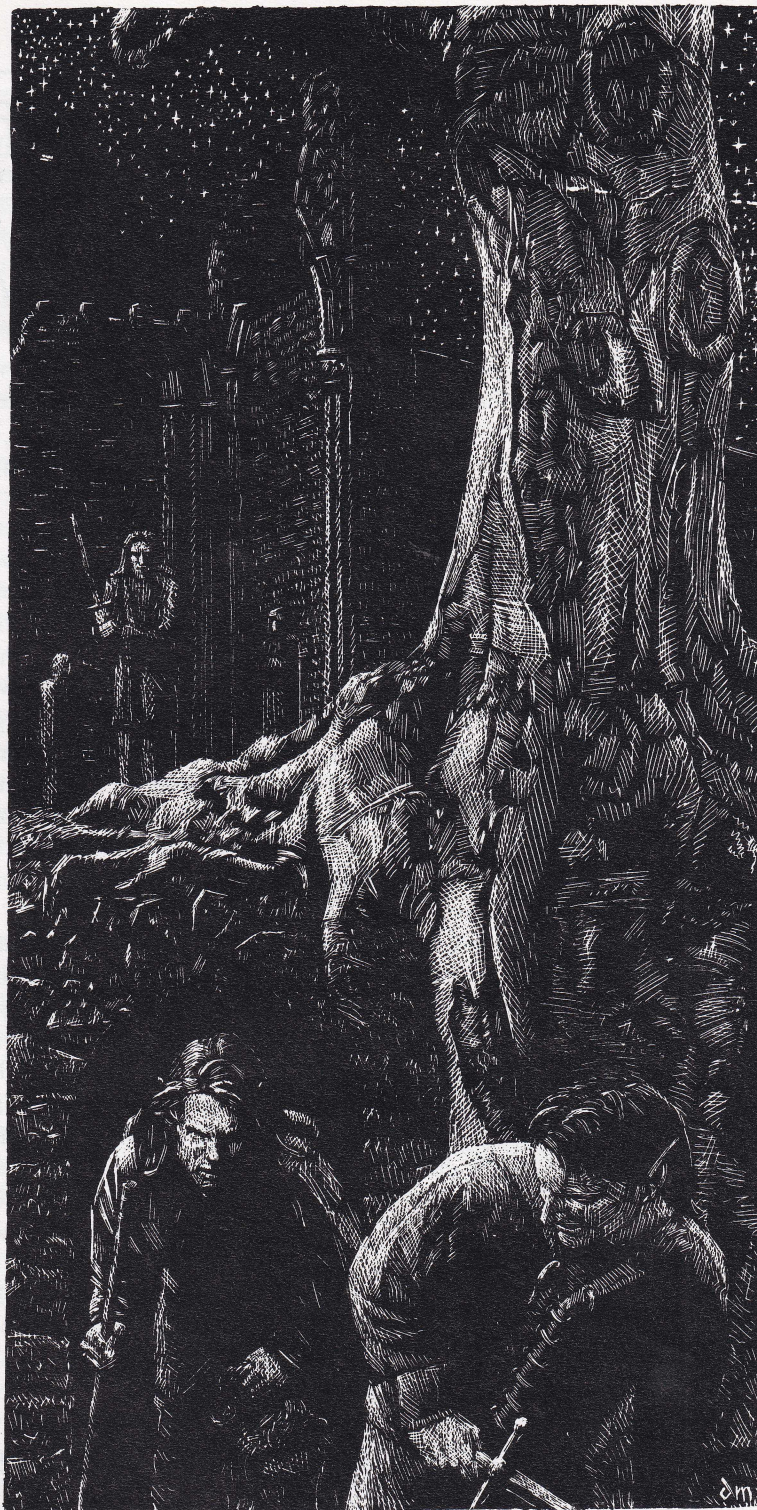
They attack the Heletian League...

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REVIEWS

VAMPIRE: THE DARK AGES

Gothic Horror Storytelling Game

White Wolf Game Studio

Reviewed by Adam Whitt

Now that White Wolf have completed the series of storyteller games set in their much vaunted gothic punk World of Darkness (*Vampire*, *Werewolf*, *Mage*, *Wraith* and *Changeling*) they plan to refresh each game with new editions with alternative settings. The first of these is **Vampire: The Dark Ages** where you get to play a leech in an era when even the lowliest serf might have the strength of faith to ruin your night... if you can find a peasant out and about after dark, that is; the majority of folk in the 12th century went to bed with the sun. The Dark Ages are a logical setting for Vampire, when the Crusades brought a new religious fervour to Europe and absolution for ones sins through the efficacy of violence inflicted on the infidel. This change of scenery gives the game a whole new twist; there are even "dungeons" to explore! (If you don't believe me, check out the Labyrinths sect).

Players of the original *Vampire* game will find much familiar territory here - the rules, many of the clans, traditions, and disciplines (superhuman talents) are the same - but there is also a fair bit of "unlearning" to be done as medieval vampire societal order is quite different from that which has evolved (eg: the Masquerade and Camarilla) through the Renaissance, the Age of Reason, the Industrial Revolution, and Information Age. Those new to the game will find much to like; most fantasy roleplayers are medievalists and will happily embrace (sorry) this setting. For jaded AD&Ders wanting to have a go at this storytelling lark, this is the ideal point of entry. Even if you don't want to switch games, you could use this book and the cavalcade of excellent support material as the dark fantasy setting for your favourite rpg, using vampires as the main adversaries.

The book has an exquisitely ponderous darkness about it. From the blood red rose on a black and purple

background on the cover, through the evocative gallery of interior illustrations and the substantially researched text throughout, one is impressed with the book's probity. *Vampire: The Dark Ages* accurately depicts a structured world order of struggle and pain before the era of humanism. This is a world trying to find its way back from the brink of chaos after the collapse of the Roman Empire, and its monsters - vampires, werewolves, mages wraiths and changelings - are just as vulnerable as the ordinary mortal folk fighting to survive past the venerable age forty. Without land or position even immortals find times tough in the Dark Ages. Atop these mundane hindrances the Cainites build their own subtle nuances of partisan rivalry, hatred and terror to haunt them in an unsympathetic world. This is a game rich in roleplaying opportunities.

Vampire: The Dark Ages follows the format that White Wolf have trademarked and other game companies have been forced to follow. Atmosphere, colour, story ideas and plot hooks outweigh the rules in importance and space taken up in the book. The core game mechanics take up all of six pages in one chapter. Learning how to play this game is easy, learning how to survive in its world is another matter entirely.

This is very fine dining indeed.

PLACES OF MYSTERY

GURPS Supplement

Steve Jackson Games

Reviewed by Lee Sheppard

My respect for Steve Jackson Games, and GURPS in particular, grows with each new release (I can't wait to see GURPS Goblins). Packed with information, good humour, stacks of adventure ideas, no superfluous waffle or empty posturing, GURPS supplements really are a delight to review. **Places of Mystery** continues the high standard that seems to typify all recent SJG releases.

Places of Mystery is a combined reference/adventure journal that sets out to detail all those places on Earth that have a sense of wonder and legend around them.

All the popular sights (both real and fantastical) are detailed, with Atlantis, Stone Circles, the Pyramids and desert cities receiving their own chapters. Every other part of the world is touched on, from Uluru to Timbuktu, Loch Ness to Knossos. Rather than reading like a dull archeological treatise however, the authors have taken great pains to ensure that this is a gaming aid of immediate accessibility. Each location is provided with maps, adventure hooks, rumours, legends and/or sample NPCs, all of good quality.

Once again, the book is illustrated by Dan Smith (who I'm growing to like very much...I wonder what his rates are?), whose black and white artwork provides just the right amount of atmosphere. A detailed index and a useful bibliography are also included in the 128 page book.

Obviously, in attempting to cover everything our world has to offer, some locations are relegated to just a cursory glance. Even so, what brief information there is provides enough of a springboard to make each location usable. In addition, some of the maps are smaller than a postage stamp, but Oh! - there are just so many maps...

Fans of *GURPS*, *Call of Cthulhu*, *The World of Indiana Jones*, *Castle Falkenstein* or dammit, any bloody RPG will find this book invaluable as a quick reference guide. Even if I don't use a quarter of the material provided in this supplement in a game or not, that doesn't really bother me, because *Places of Mystery* is just a rollicking good read.

THE COMPLETE CARRIERS AT WAR

Computer Naval Wargame

Strategic Studies Group (SSG)

Reviewed by Andrew Daniels

Carriers At War has been around forever, and it shows in its archaic presentation. Don't look for amazing sound and graphics here. This CD-Rom is a collection of the original CAW, CAW2, a host of various scenarios and the Construction Kit all conveniently stowed on one disk. Plotting the naval campaigns of World War II this is a game for hard core wargamers. You are flooded by masses of information: ship and aircraft statistics, game options and tactical decisions. There is a walk-through in the manual to get you out to sea and into battle, but you are soon left to your own

devices as this tutorial leaves you right in the middle of things with no clear idea of what to do next. And, as the tutorial is a live scenario, a random element means that things can happen that the walk through hasn't even mentioned. Being an Admiral ain't supposed to be easy.

Following a brief run through of the basics, the manual is mostly given over to the Construction Kit, the real heart of the game. Here you get to re-write history or fight those engagements that history has more or less forgotten but still keep you awake at night worrying "What if?"

Carriers At War is one of the benchmarks against which computerised war simulations are judged and getting this much on one disk is great value for money. I just wonder, however, in this world of video rendered graphics and high fidelity sound whether there is still the market for this type of game.

THE NORTH

Forgotten Realms Boxed Supplement

TSR Inc

Reviewed by Lee Sheppard

Look - you know what you're going to get without me having to tell you, don't you? You don't? OK, for those who came in late, you get a big box filled with maps, booklets (varying in size from 36 to 96 pages) and stacks of artwork that you've all seen before (on magazine covers, t-shirts, cards, pillow cases, key rings, toothbrushes, caps, calendars etc etc etc). Hey TSR! just because the artwork is good doesn't mean we have to keep seeing it *over and over again* - it's like watching the same three Simpsons cartoons every night for six months - eventually it just stops being funny.

Enough. I've obviously been reading too much Peter Crank. I am also aware that there are about 3000 million of you out there (*including me*, believe it or not) that like AD&D and genuinely want to know what's in this release. So here goes.

The North: Guide to the Savage Frontier boxed set details that area of the *Forgotten Realms* bounded by Daggerford in the south, Ten Towns in the north, Anauroch in the east and that blue stuff called water to the west. Two large, full colour maps of the area provide all the detail you need (TSR do pretty good maps, I'll give them that), each map backed by either random monster tables (*I'm not saying nothing...*) or the nicely detailed plan of the town of Daggerford.

Daggerford is also fully covered in one of the three booklets that come with the boxed set, the town basically designed to serve as the base for your hearty team of adventurers. The Cities booklet details all of the major settlements of the campaign area, complete with NPCs, rumours and adventure hooks aplenty (where do they keep coming up with all this stuff?) and the Wilderness booklet (the largest of the three) covers all of the areas in between, including timelines, a geographical overview, monsters and races.

Unlike some other releases, there is no overlying campaign storyline to the setting, so players and DMs are free to simply explore the region to their hearts' content, following whichever rumours and adventure hooks suit their playing style and/or levels/abilities. Certainly an enjoyable way to spend a few evenings.

All earlier kidding aside, this is another quality product from TSR. Like nearly all of the Forgotten Realms releases (Al-Qadim was definitely my personal favourite) *The North* is packed with useful material. So much material, in fact, that you could probably buy just this boxed set and spend your entire role-playing life completely within the campaign setting. But then you'd miss out on next month's releases...

RIFTS GM COMPANION

Computer Software Aid for Rifts

Palladium Books, Inc

Reviewed by Ron Fielding

Only available direct from Palladium Books mail order (call US 313-946-2900), the **RGMC** is a nifty piece of software that takes the headache out of Rifts character creation. This Windows program is both a character generator and a database of skills, magic spells, psionic powers, cybernetics, weapons, vehicles and equipment from the core **Rifts** rulebooks. The interface is simple, a series of drop down menus takes you where you want to go quickly. Characters can be generated with skills and bonuses all allocated and calculated in a fraction of the time it takes with paper and pencil, and a printed character sheet is a mouse button click away. The referee can upload his own cast of NPCs, keep track of the gear and experience picked up by the players and use the database as an online reference (the text is lifted directly from the Rifts RPG, Rifts Conversion Books One & Two and Rifts Mercenaries rulebooks).

This is an extremely useful utility for overworked Rifts referees. A few graphics files illustrating some of the weapons, gear, character races and so forth would have been nice, but I guess anyone buying into this already has those in the rulebooks. With so many people hooked into computers these days, there really ought to be more software like this available from the games manufacturers.

Gets a big "thumbs up" from me.

TAINT OF MADNESS

Call of Cthulhu Source Book

Chaosium, Inc

Reviewed by Andrew Daniels

Call of Cthulhu's Investigators are doomed to descend into insanity as they delve ever deeper into secrets man was not meant to know. **Taint Of Madness** fleshes out the sanity (SAN) rules so that players can now roleplay through their insanity and recovery. Beginning with an interesting look at how insanity has been defined throughout the ages and the prominent figures who have studied it the book goes on to present the treatments these people pioneered. This is where it gets really scary: restraints, drug therapy, and electro-shock treatment. Check out the cage they called the "Crib" or the spinning Hollow Wheel. These devices are guaranteed to calm down mad Uncle Ben. Just the thought of them unnerved me.

Instead of simply losing SAN and recovering it in downtime players now have various phobias, delusions and a psycho-sexual problems to suffer from. Insights into roleplaying and overcoming these illness are also presented. The road to recovery begins with the Psychiatric Interview which guides players through the processes of commitment, evaluation, diagnosis and treatment.

The section entitled "Insanity, Society and the Law" explains how to commit your favourite relative, and if need be, how to get them out again. There is also a long list on of Institutions so you can choose your preferred home for mad old Uncle Ben. These range from honourable old establishments to a few you'd worry about committing your worse enemy to. All useful gaming information.

The book also provides three excellent scenarios each set in Asylums - Bethlem (1890's), Arkham (1920's) and Bellevue (1990's) - complete with maps, outlines of staff and inmates, each a dark tale of madness and horror.

This is one of the best sourcebooks I've come across in a long time. With roots set firmly in history, this kind of material is both interesting and often more horrifying than anything fiction can dish out and unlike some recent arrivals does not need to descend to the pathetic "I can show more gore and blood than you can" mentality. If there's one thing this product does show, is that you can produce quality, intelligent horror gaming material without the need to rely upon the grotesque. Entertaining and useful.

BETWEEN THE SHADOWS

Nightbane World Book One

Palladium Books, Inc

Reviewed by Andrew Daniels

Between the Shadows explores three new worlds for the Nightbane RPG: the "real" world of the Spook Squad and two ethereal realms, the Astral Plane and the Dreamstream.

The Spook Squad, or members of the American Defence Agency, are espionage operatives fighting the invasion of the Darklords. In true Palladium fashion this book presents a swag of new character classes, gear etc. alongside mountains of information on the ADA, its history and directions. All basic spy fare.

The Astral Zone is more exciting, a psychic universe often referred to as the Ghost Zone where worlds are created from ectoplasm and ruled by Astral Lords. It is a realm of thought and imagination, where anything is possible, populated by a variety of weird inhabitants such as Millek's (Astral Guides), Tarantuloids (no prizes for guessing what these are), and of course the ever present baddies. Take the Torturians for example; leather clad beings covered in metal studs and wielding whips and chains who capture and torment wandering prey. Very Village People.

The Dreamstream is a product of the collective human subconscious, and it is connected to each sentient being. Each night we enter the Dreamstream, which, like all places Palladium, is chocka with spikey types. The Dream Ghouls, for example, are gruesome doll-like creatures which inhabit the dreams of children and plan on doing all sorts of devilish things to them. The Dream Domains are beset by Dream Storms in which live the Dream Dancers and Dream Makers who fight Dream Combat. Aargh!

It is all too much! Why, if you can find just about anything from Star Trek to

Middle Earth on the Astral Plane, do we need the Dreamscape? And we haven't even been to the Darklords home dimension yet. Isn't the fact that humans are transforming into horrific creatures whilst evil beings from the Darklands are taking over the planet an interesting enough setting without all this elaboration into new realms? I realise that this book is exploring the worlds between worlds option but enough is enough! What I'd like to see is some well thought out scenarios using the established setting. A few less options and a few more specifics rather than another mind blowing set of vagaries. I mean there's even a section on linking Nightbane to RIFTS for goodness sake!

Don't get me wrong, this is another amazing sustained creative effort from the Palladium team, but maybe I'm just too lazy to play their games any more.

LUNCH MONEY

Card Combat Game

Atlas Games

Reviewed by Lee Sheppard

This game is sick, really sick...and we LOVE IT!!! **Lunch Money** is a card game (non-collectible!! - Hooray, hooray, stick that up your bum you speculator bastards!!) that simulates a vicious, no-holds-barred street fight in that most unforgiving of places - the schoolyard.

The artwork on the cards is just brilliant, and is really what makes the game for me. Each card bears a photograph (very moody, almost surrealistic) of a cute little girl. When combined with the wording on the card however, then the game reveals it's darker side. "This may sting a little" says the knife weapon card; "Say hi to GOD for me" states the roundhouse card; "Take your pick" for the elbow strike - I think you get the picture. I almost wet myself when I first opened the pack in the Realms office.

The 110 card deck (enough for up to four players) is split into defensive (block, first aid etc), basic attack (elbow, hail Mary, headbutt etc), weapon (pipe, knife...) and speciality cards (choke, headlock, poke in the eye...). Each player is dealt 5 cards, which can be replenished after each round. Players then take turns attacking, discarding, administering first aid or playing speciality cards in an attempt to gain the upper hand. To win the game, you simply have to take the

other players' lunch money (15 life points/hit points) away from them - by beating the living crap out of them.

Game play is fast (and I mean *fast* - Nick wiped me out in 2 minutes the first time we played) and furious. We were up and running within 5 minutes of opening the pack. A couple of quick rules checks as we played the first game and then that's it. Three or more players lengthens game play, but increases the playground angst ("We're not going to be your friend today...").

It may not sound like it, but there is some strategy involved in this game. Each successful hit takes a number of corresponding points away from the other player, with some particular combinations doing mega-damage, so keeping some defensive cards on hand is essential (try fending off an uppercut after a poke in the eye! - I certainly couldn't). Additionally, certain cards (both offensive and defensive) can only be played after others, and a lucky block can soon stuff up your "Big Combo". Players are also encouraged to spice up their card play with some appropriate dialogue, adding to the overall fun of the game ("Eat Power Ranger ring, girly-swt" WHACK!, "You pooped your pants yesterday, bum-face" KRETCH!).

The rules are simple, the cards a delight and the game play infectious. Buy a pack for your non-gaming friends as well - they'll love it. If you're sick to death of all this *collectible* card crap (and who isn't?) - then this is your kind of card game.

THEATRIX Core Rules 1.

Universal Diceless Roleplaying Game

Backstage Press

Reviewed by Adam Whitt

This game could change the way you roleplay, *if you let it*. That's the main criterion before buying this book; you have to be prepared to change, to experiment, to learn new techniques and apply these changes to your roleplaying sessions - otherwise give Theatrix a miss and stick with Bludgeons and Flagons.

Diceless roleplaying is not new, it has been in vogue at Australian gaming conventions for years, but here is a codified version that all us non-convention-goers can try. **Theatrix: The Core Rules** covers all the bases that have become the norm in an RPG - ie. character creation; roleplaying hints; skills and action resolution; combat;

adventure design; and how to referee. Reading such rules in other games can be like eating a sawdust sandwich, but here the text is written with a central extended metaphor that likens roleplaying to the performing arts (interactive theatre and film) which makes it quite entertaining. Many of the techniques presented are taken directly from films - foreshadowing, cut scenes, flashbacks, dream sequences etc. These are all very good ideas that will help any referee prepared to experiment and spice up his storytelling style. That's the beauty of this book - it is a fine technical manual for the art of roleplaying (all styles from hack and slash to angst-ridden navel gazing are catered for) that can be ported to any game system or genre.

Although *Theatrix* does allow the random element of dice if you really can't get by without that, the central theme of the system is that referees should use their common sense in resolving all actions taken by players. In *Theatrix* the most important element in this decision making process is: How will the success or failure (and there can be varying degrees of either) of the players' action affect the plot and dramatic consistency of your story? So, fast-paced action adventures in the vein of Indiana Jones should feature miraculous escapes and feats of amazing and barely plausible derring-do, whilst murder-mysteries or horror adventures should have the player characters much less capable and living by their wits.

Theatrix is less a rulebook and more a superb "how to" for all roleplayers.

NETRUNNER

Cyberpunk Collectible Card Game

Wizards of the Coast

Reviewed by Chris Johnson

All right! After a lot of hype and waiting, the card game based on R. Talsorian's *Cyberpunk 2020* game is out. A friend came around with a starter pack he'd purchased. It's the perfect setup. A starter contains two decks, one for the Corporation, one for the Runner, so without me having purchased a card we could have a game. Now I'm hooked on another CCG. Damn him, damn him to Hades, just when I was saving for a car.

Anyway, to the game. *Netrunner* is unlike other trading card games in one main way. The two sides of the battle play quite different cards and actions. The Corp. and the Runner build decks from completely different pools. The cards

actually have different backs. Each player draws five cards and gets 5 bits. A bit is like mana from *M:TG*, except it hangs around (and is harder to generate), more like the Destiny Pool in *DoomTrooper* or the Blood Pool in *Jyhad*. The Corp draws a card, then has three actions, and for each it can; Draw a card, get a Bit, Install a card (such as ICE), Play an operation, Advance a card (such as an Agenda) or screw over a Runner it has a Tag on. On the Runner's turn he/she has 4 actions (but no standard draw) and can; Draw a card, get a Bit, Install a card (such as an ICE Breaker), play a prep, make a Run, lose a Tag.

The point of the game is for the Corp. to score "Agendas". These are plans, tricks, business deals, that sort of thing. The Runner's aim is to expose (steal) the Agendas. Once either side has seven agenda points they win. Also, if the Corp. cards-out (can't draw a card when needed) the Runner wins. If the Runner flatlines (has to discard more cards from his/her hand than possible) the Corp wins. The main action of the game comes when the Runner tries to break into data forts that protect Agendas. The Corp defends these forts with ICE (Intrusion Countermeasures Electronics) that range from a simple Code Gate to a Killer Zombie that'll fry the Runner in an instant.

The art is superb, as you would expect from Wizards. No description can do it justice. Wander into a gaming store, I'm sure someone'll have some cards you can look at.

Don't touch this game unless you mean it; it's *too* addictive. What can you say? It's a Garfield game.

CHAOS OVERLORD

Strategic Gang Warfare CD-Rom

New World Computing

Reviewed by Andrew Daniels

The year is 2050. Organised crime rules the city. Absolute control is yours if you want it. Be smart, be quick and be ruthless. Well that sounds like me!

I must admit, *Chaos Overlord* had me a little confused. Sure it says "strategy" on the glossy packaging, but any game which boasts 70 specialised criminal gangs, over 50 different weapons, a box covered in ugly mutants and the catchcry, "*The Chaos has just begun*", just has to be filled with graphic gang violence, right? Wrong! When you whack in the disc and hit *Terminate* all you get is a view of a big city divided into squares

and a lot of numbers. Disappointing.

Chaos Overlord has you playing one of six crime lords who are intent on taking control of the city. To do this you hire gangs of thugs who terrorise the locals into paying you extortion money, so that you can go buy more gangs who... Get the picture? Meanwhile, your five opponents (computer or human with several networking options) are doing likewise, which means that sooner or later you have to eliminate them in order to win. It's *SimCity* with attitude.

After the initial disappointment at the sedate graphic elements, the game actually does get quite moreish. Even at Goon level winning is difficult. There are multiple scenarios with various objectives and the game flows fairly cleanly. Clicking on your city block brings up your gangs. Each has a nice little picture and a short description. The strategy element arises here as you need to allocate your gangs tasks based on their particular attributes and specialities; chaos causes the blocks populace to hand over the money, research increases the standard of available weaponry, and so forth. You can also "influence" (read, hold guns to heads) various institutions to join your cause. Winning over a hospital, for example, increases your ability to heal gangs. Which of course brings us to the reason we need healing; fighting. To win, new territories must be won. In order to do this, you gotta kick some heads. So you send your gang next door, and they try to terminate opposition gangs. Here is about the only real animation in the game as you watch two duelling stick figures demonstrate how they wave their sword, pull their trigger or kick their foot as your health bar shrinks. Not very exciting.

Chaos Overlord is a good, challenging strategy game. It's easy enough to get the hang of, and the novelty of playing the villain for a change kept me coming back for more, but somehow the game lacks the atmosphere and excitement that the outer packing promises to give it any real longevity. Maybe I've been getting too much *Doom*?

POCKET REVIEWS

The release of **Players Option: Spells & Magic** sees bookshelves everywhere groan under the weight of another 192 page hardback for the AD&D game. This addition is quite welcome, however, as it marks the introduction of several optional spell point systems that can only improve the AD&D magic rules. There is a lot of redundant stuff here that is a reprise of the *Players Handbook* and the *Tome of Magic*, but there are enough good ideas and new stuff to make it worth your while if you play a cleric or wizard.

The reprint of the **Ravenloft Monstrous Compendiums I & II** (TSR) is pretty much just that, a rehash with some new art and perfect binding (as opposed to the loose leaf of the old and beloved MC format). The "how-to" advice sections on running Ravenloft horror in a story-telling vein are commendable but undermined by some of the monster entries; I defy any referee to make *halfling* vampires scary. Still, there are many excellent undead critters in this 128 page compilation and if you don't have the original appendices this is worth the dosh.

Edgework 4 (Atlas Games) is a cool prozine devoted to the *Over The Edge* RPG. Thirty-two pages of weirdness includes articles on vampirism in OTE, news snippets from Al Amarja (the OTE campaign setting) and an article on crossing R. Talsorian Games' *Cybergeneration* game with OTE. The source material is useful, the text is of a uniformly high standard and the artwork features Australia's own Tonia Walden so this publication represents good value for OTE fans - if you can find it downunder.

After a long hiatus, we recently received several shipments from White Wolf bringing us up to date with their releases so I thought we'd pocket review a smattering of them here...

I've always thought that Mark Rein♦Hagen must be a prat (anyone who hyphenates his name with a weird symbol is half-way there), and the foreword to **Book of the Kindred** (White Wolf) confirms my view: the Hollywood names drop like snot from a young Goth's nose. Still, credit where credit is due; Rein♦Hagen's game designs have shoved the roleplaying hobby into new realms of creativity. This book is a companion to the Aaron Spelling TV series (*Kindred*:

The Embraced) that serves as a superb overview of Mark's World of Darkness and the role of vampires. Recommended reading for those interested in the WoD but unable to delve through all the sourcebooks. Even better, it may hook some of the TV viewers into roleplaying.

Also for World Of Darkness games, but particularly for *Mage: The Ascension* are White Wolf's **Tarot** cards. The 78 cards come in a purple and gold sturdy cardboard box along with a 128 page full colour booklet describing how to use the cards in your storytelling games. The cards are magnificent: on good card stock they feature some excellent art and are gorgeously coloured. The images are not those of the *classic* tarot deck, although the set does mirror the tarot's structure. Each illustration contains such detail and variety that in combination the cards do generate a huge number of plot hooks and character concepts. A neat accessory, but hide them from mum!

The Risen (White Wolf) is a cheery (not!) 76 page sourcebook for *Wraith: The Oblivion* featuring folks who walk between the world of the living and the dead - undead, equally reviled by both. It seems that a violent death and unfinished business tends to make the dead want to hang around after their funeral. The book contains all you need to play one of these surly characters, including new Arcanoi, Merits and Flaws and rules. Trouble with this character type is, once you've dealt with the unfinished business you've got nothing to do but lie down and play dead.

A special plug here for **Red Talons** (White Wolf) a tribebook for *Werewolf: The Apocalypse* as it has been written by Aussie Realms contributor, Ben Chessell. The Red Talons are an instinct-driven wolf tribe and Gaia's hunters - making them huge fun to play. Ben has done a fine job of bringing these angry young men of the Garou world to life. Snarly.

Critics have been bemoaning a lack of *Rifts* adventure books for some time, well now Palladium Books presents... the **Rifts Index & Adventures Vol. One**. At long last, a batch of adventures for this wonderful game of hi-tech mayhem. The 96 pages are evenly divided between the index, which is kinda useless because it's already out of date, and scenarios, adventure hooks and campaign starters, which are truly excellent. Much better fare than more weapons and 'bots.

Looking for some hard and fast action for your joystick? Then check out **Assault Rigs** (Psygnosis) on CD-Rom. Although the graphics on my 8 meg 486DX don't quite measure up to the screen shots on the box, the sound is booming, the scrolling faultless and the game play is fun. The game challenges you to negotiate a series of 3D mazes in a futuristic battle tank picking up tokens, power-ups and notches on your kill belt as you go. Mindless violence enacted on faceless enemies, can't beat it!

Another cool computer game that we've had a while but not got around to reviewing (mostly because we're still stuck on disc 2) is the cyberpunk adventure **Angel Devoid** (Mindscape). The graphics, sound and plot of this game are state of the art and immerse you in a Ridley Scott-like world of mystery and intrigue. Your mission, should you accept it, is to try to figure out why Angel Devoid's (cop hero gone bad) face has been grafted onto your mug by a filthy "ripper-doc", making you a desperate fugitive in a hostile world. If you can work out the puzzles, can survive (save often 'cause everyone's gunning for your hide), and you like cyberpunk then you'll love this game. Please send help!

A duo of excellent sourcebooks for *Earthdawn* are **The Book Exploration** and **The Serpent River** (FASA). The former is second in the Legends of Earthdawn series and presents an exciting cornucopia of adventure hooks, non-player characters and story seeds to keep your players busy for many months to come. The latter book is a more traditional sourcebook detailing the Serpent River, the main trade route through Barsaive, which is dominated by the effervescent T'Skrang. Great depth, colour and detail on T'Skrang and on a Barsaive emerging from the Scourge. The expanding Earthdawn cannon continues to impress.

Alliances (Wizards of the Coast), an expansion for *Ice Age/Magic: The Gathering* has been out for a little while now and Chris' assessment is that it passes muster. It's full of useful new cards that don't cost mana to use (instead they cost life or cards from your hand), mana generators and cost-effective creatures. There are several cards that you will want to slot right into your tournament deck. And as always the artwork is of a superior quality. ■

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A high quality role playing magazine that is produced right here in Australia, in Perth. A bimonthly publication that has already seen 23 issues, it contains 48 A4 pages and a full colour cover. It reviews new products, a regular section on PBM games, book reviews, a brief overview of new products from a host of suppliers, and lots of scenarios, adventures, short stories or source material for many different role playing games, including *ShadowRun*, *AD&D*, *Cyberpunk*, *Mage*, *Earthdawn*, *Traveller*, *Vampire*, as well as popular board games and miniatures games, such as *BattleTech*, *Space Marine*, *Warhammer 40,000*, etc, etc.

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Avalon Hill's great publication that deals exclusively with Avalon Hill simulations (what a surprise!). Each issue highlights a specific (usually new) product, with extensive feature articles. However a selection of popular games (such as ASL, Third Reich, Diplomacy etc) are also regularly covered in detail. Article definition includes series replays scenarios, designer's notes, strategy & tactics, optional rules, coming attractions & (infrequently) variant counters. Good publication regularity.

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PROTOCOLTURE ADDICTS

We've been looking for a top quality magazine on Japanese anime and manga ever since *Animag* disappeared forever. We have found one! *Protocolture Addicts* is brought out bimonthly - there have already been 29 issues. It is produced by *Janus Publications*, the people who have given us *Heavy Gear Fighter*. This magazine reviews all things to do with anime: games, CDs, cartoons, books, manga, and videos. It has full features covering anime movies & videos, with episode by episode descriptions; anime stories, etc. Profusely illustrated with shots from videos, etc.

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PYRAMID

Steve Jackson's new bimonthly role playing magazine. It is 72 pages in length, and features reports on overseas cons, reviews hot selling games, such as *Earthdawn*, contains scenarios and designer's notes on things such as GURPS, Car Wars, Toon, etc. It also has many regular features such as Steve Jackson's games news and release schedule, industry news, AADA news, etc. It also contains some rather tongue in cheek rip offs of other games. For example, they are running a series of Toon supplements, such as: *Hampire: The Masked Ace Raid*, and coming is *Werewolf: Ah, Pork Lips*. Gee, which games are they ripping off?

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SCRYE

: The Collectible Trading Card Game Guide A high quality 68 page magazine by ILM International, that specifically covers Collectible Trading card Games. The first two issues have been a huge success and sold out the world over. I'm looking at issue # 2 while I write this review, and it contains many goodies: the complete rules for the *Star Trek Next Generation Collectible Trading Card Game*, a preview of *Galactic Empires*, some teasers on the *Illuminati Collectible Trading Card Game*, a complete price guide for: *Magic: The Gathering Alpha*, *Beta*, *Unlimited*, *Arabian Nights*, *Antiquities*, *Legends*, *Spellfire*; a checklist for *The Dark*; interviews, designer notes for *Jyhad*, the rules for *Galactic Empires* - need I go on?

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THE DUELIST

By Wizards of the Coast, this is a brand new full colour quarterly magazine that supports *Magic the Gathering* and future Deckmaster products in the collectible trading card game genre. Every issue features the latest trading card products, articles on game variants, previews of up and coming Deckmaster products, interviews with artists and designers, news from the tournament circuit, and tips on play.

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A professional American fanzine-style B4 digest of arcane lore for the Call of Cthulhu keeper, player & enthusiast. Articles include the standard selection of scenarios, campaign details, new Lovecraftian (?) beasts, background source material, and the other related miscellany. Everyone who enjoys Chaosium's superb horror RPG would be well advised to invest in this magazine. Quality material by known English and Australian authors are regularly included. Publication regularity is slow.

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WHITE DWARF

A glossy, monthly English magazine solely dedicated to Games Workshop products. Enthusiasts of Warhammer RPG, Warhammer Fantasy Battles, Warhammer 40K, Space Hulk, Space Marine, and all the rest, will find this invaluable. Articles cover adventures, scenarios, new rules, variant counters, backgrounds, and the like. Every issue contains photographs & specifications for new Citadel releases, plus colour pages highlighting superb miniatures painting! Publication regularity is very good.

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WHITE WOLF

This magazine has been cancelled by White Wolf. They are no longer printing it.

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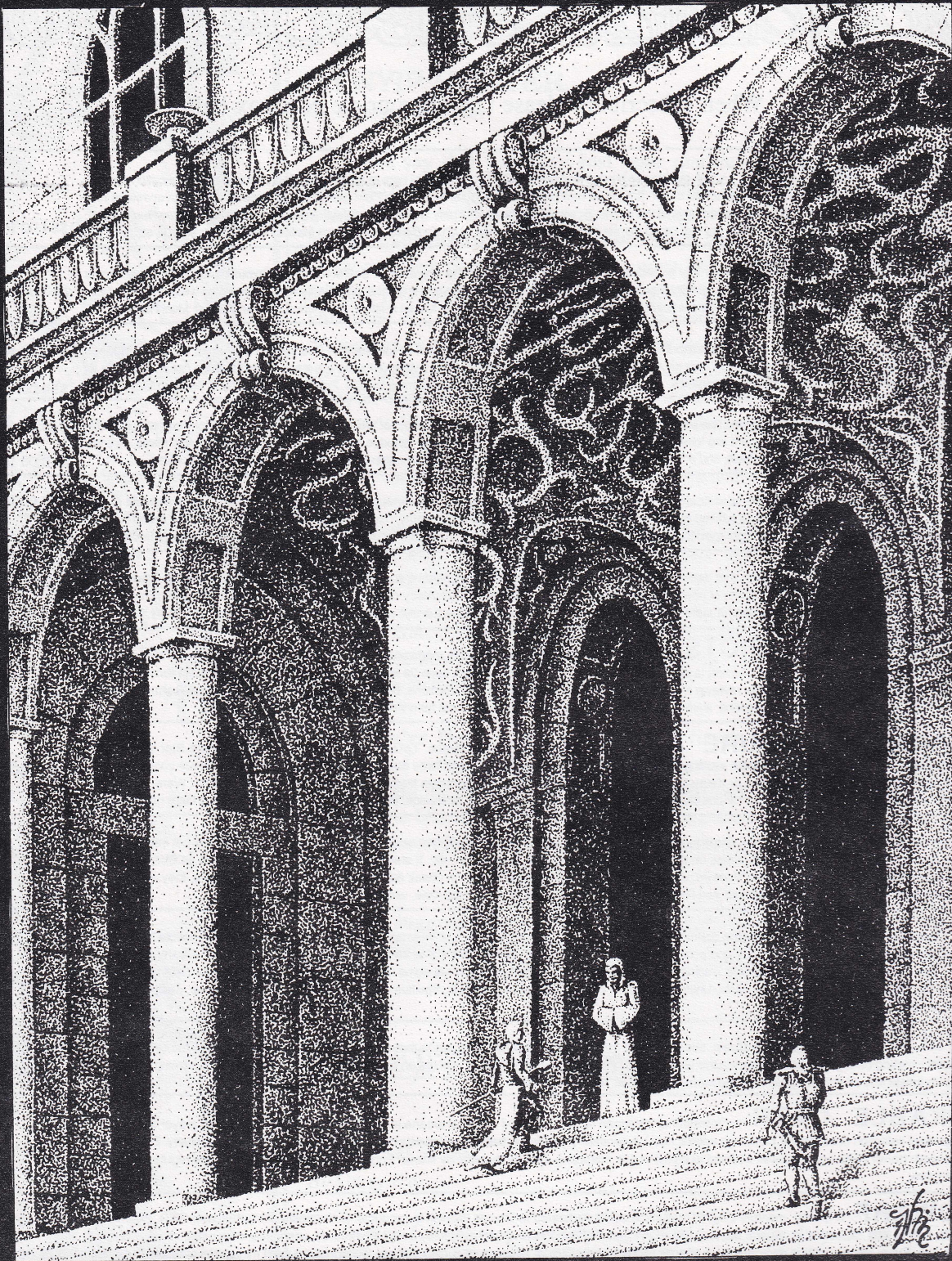
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WELCOME TO THE VIBRANT HEART OF UNAE THE CAPITAL OF WAIR-RAE

YAMIERE

by Colin Taber and Adam Whitt

WELCOME...

This adventure serves as an introduction to the magnificent pillar city capital of Wair-Rae, Yamere. Yamere is the vibrant heart of Unae where Elvish High King Caemerou's plots beat with a mad urgency that will pump blood all over Unae. Humans who believe Holy Greater Baimiopia, Vangre or Pont de Fassel are capitals of grandeur, come look on Yamere and wonder.

FORMAT

Presented here are a number of adventure seeds and storylines to hook your players into Yamere, the gateway to Wair-Rae. After these adventure hooks we provide a guide to the city and a map. Much more detailed information on the pillar city, its people, history and the nation it commands can be found in the first Unae book, the *Wair-Rae Chronicle* available by the end of August.

...TO YAMERE

Trading ships from all over Dormetia and as far away as Prabeq and Hindia dock at Wair-Rae's two greatest ports; Akermanis and the capital, Yamere. In these cities foreigners are welcomed for the news, vitality and variety they bring. The elves of Wair-Rae might often seem a narrow-minded and arrogant lot, but their intelligence and curiosity means they welcome the new and strange, even if they do not embrace it fully. A foreigner is welcome in Wair-Rae, even a Fletlander (see issue 16 or the *Wair-Rae Chronicle* - henceforth known as *WRCI*) but the outsiders should still know their place.

Wair-Rae has a large lower class made up of *commoner elves* and beneath them a *worker* population which is almost exclusively human. It is important for any human travelling to Wair-Rae to avoid any in depth dealings with the worker population, and also advisable that no comment is made on the status, treatment or wellbeing of this slave-like population to their elven masters. The best way for a human visitor to Wair-Rae to distinguish him or herself from the workers is to dress well in quality and clean clothes which clearly show through symbolism or cost that the wearer is not of Wair-Rae or in no way a coinless slave or worker. Many of the human merchants who travel regularly to Wair-Rae have taken to wearing an arm band of blue cloth with an embroidered gold Baimiopian Star upon it. Even those who do not follow such a faith, or are clearly not from the Heletian League, such as the Prabesk and Fletlanders, have taken to donning identical arm bands as they clearly label them as outsiders, and humans who should therefore not be treated with the

same contempt that the elves reserve for their worker population.

Upon arrival in Wair-Rae taxes must be paid to the authorities and coin converted (see *WRC1*). Once these necessities are done the pillar city of Yamere (more formally known as Greater Yamere) lays before you, open and ready for business.

Lodgings are taken by most traders on the Avenue of Magic, or by the more regular visitors (who are known to the city guard and somewhat trusted) in the Docklands, alongside the worker population.

There are many reasons to go to Yamere and many ways to get there. The most common is to arrive on a trading ship. Elven society thrives on the new and exotic, it rushes from one fad to the next; currently Heletian textiles and Greater Baimiopian red wine are in strong demand, a need that sees at least two ships a week land in Yamere and one in Akermanis. Also in strong demand are the narcotics like the Prabeq smoking leaf, *Qat* (see issue 14), *Lobeel Roots*, *Black Leaf*, and other exotic herbs and spices that the Prabesk merchant empire brings in from far off Hindia. The dead of night, the back alleys and the shadows hide a growing trade in slaves. The slave trade is something which goes to the heart of Wair-Rae, the Noble Houses. These great families have a need (for many reasons) of Saldan cooks, Prabesk dancers and well grown young Heletian men and women. This a quiet and small aspect of the smuggling that does go on, but represents another opportunity for entrance into Wair-Rae.

Most incoming trade is handled through the immensely wealthy Merchant Houses of Wair-Rae. Occasionally these Houses will subcontract gathering goods and shipping them. As a general rule they will not hesitate to send the ships of their vast commercial fleets to any corner of Unae necessary if there is a coin driven demand back at home in the pillar cities.

LANGUAGE BARRIERS

One of the biggest barriers to smooth interaction with the elves of Wair-Rae is that of language. There is no "common tongue" on Unae, although if the elves have their way there soon will be. Wair-Rae nobility is well schooled and fluent in most languages but few adventurers will be speaking with these exalted persons. Many elvish merchants and traders understand enough Prabeq or Heletian to transact their business, but generally they prefer to speak in their native tongue - it gives them the upper hand in such dealings. As for commoner elves, they only have enough "foreign" words to let you know how they feel about you. When in Yamere either learn Velsanan (elvish) or else hire a translator.

History tells of the elven race coming from an isolated continent, the long lost land Velsana. Here, isolated from the rest of Unae, elven culture was swift to advance, but not peacefully. The earliest era of elven society was one of constant conflict, endless war embroiled my people. The blood and flames of battle forged us into the steel that we now are.

After decades of war that had divided Velsana into the camps of two high kings a crossroads was reached. Everything on both sides of the conflict was poured into the war effort. The produce of the soil went to feed the military. The deep ores of the land were dug out and forged into weapons. Children born to loving parents were raised and trained, only to be sent off to die in battle. Velsana was stripped of its many gifts. And yet there was no victor.

King Kel Nagra, tiring of the stalemate challenged King Dia Albi to open battle on the plains of Ansilsae. The challenge was accepted.

The battlefield was a grassy plain beside a dull white sandy beach. The day was of calm but bleak weather, the watching sea strangely quiet. Upon the field lay half a million dead, at each end of the field a further half million grimly prepared to wade into the bloody heart of war.

The gods looked upon their restless children with growing fury in their hearts. The slaughter must end. One final chance would be given. Only one. Their children had come of age and the road was narrow, any who strayed would be forever destroyed.

During a lull in the battle the High Priests of the elven faiths were given a terrible vision. As they sank into a divinely inspired trance the priests saw the world teeming with life, such diversity, such numbers, such vitality it thrilled them. But they could see no elves. The High Priests appeared to each other in the shared vision, each searching for the children of their gods.

Where were the elves?

The High Priests joined forces and raced across Unae with divine speed and celestial wings.

Where were the elves?

The other races of Unae thronged in vast numbers and diverse cultures. When asked none of them knew of the elves, none had ever heard of them.

Where were the elves?

Urgency gripped them as the High Priests used their celestial wings to fly high above these foreign lands. With spell speed they followed the sun into the west; far out amidst the deepest ocean

PLOTS TO CLAIM THE UNWITTING

There are is much to do and see in Yamere. Upon the arrival of your players the following plotlines are in the process of unfolding=, you could involve them in all to one degree or another. Next issue we present a scenario and other hooks set in Yamere. More plot suggestions can be found for Yamere and the rest of Wair-Rae, including the Kalraith Colonies, the Southern Colonies, Lae Ossard and Serhaem in WRC1.

1. House Fiquene are known for their greed and disloyalty, they are marked by many as holding the very elements told of in the Ansilsae that elven society has to rid itself of to survive. Yet this rich and powerful family persists to survive and thrive. The Fiquene and their allies represent the biggest division within the court of the Fifth Dominion today.

It is said that old Jorin Fiquene, the three hundred and twenty nine year old businessman and head of this strong House has been suffering visitations of late, visitations from none other than the ghost of Grae Jenn. This spectre has come seeking justice for the wrongs House Fiquene committed against him some four millennia ago. His hauntings have not just been the rattling of chains, he was reputed to be the best elven warrior to walk the face of Unae. On the first morning of every week, in the family's pillar tower in Rumaza, a dead guard is found, slitted open from belly to groin. Worse, the location of each successive murder is one chamber or corridor closer to Jorin's private apartments at the summit of Tower Rumaza. Such unsettling events are best hushed up, but slowly the Fiquene are finding it harder and harder to find men willing to be household guards.

Jorin Fiquene, in dire need of rest has moved from the family's power base in Rumaza to the capital, Yamere. Here he seeks to live unmolested by unnatural visions and spectres while cabalists and priests in Rumaza try and exorcise the spirit of Grae Jenn. The day the players arrive in Yamere, so too does Jorin Fiquene. For good pay he will offer them work as his guards. If they are good at their job he will take them back to Rumaza with him in two weeks time.

It is rumoured around the Royal Court and thus the markets of Yamere that the Fiquene are having some sort of "problem". After only three days in the capital (in the Fiquene House's pillar tower) odd things will happen: milk will curdle, lamps will blow out when there is no wind, and fresh blood will stain Jorin Fiquene's clothes when he is not wounded. Matters will only worsen until Grae Jenn's ghostly image will appear, sending Jorin fleeing back to Rumaza.

THE ISLAND of WAIRINIR



2. The Escaped Gladiator - While the players are looking around the markets of Yamere they see a well muscled man running through the crowd. Amidst startled cries and the sounds of distant whistles it becomes apparent that the Heletian is fleeing the city guard. From his looks and his clothes it seems likely that he is one of the gladiators from the Arena. Some of the elves who have also worked out what the human is doing throw baskets and fruit in his path. He slips, and an elf pounces on him, but he is a big strong man and gains his feet again before forcing his way up and away. Just down the street he passes some stalls and rounds a corner to run down an alleyway. Once through, some human street workers push their cart full of stones quickly into the opening, tipping it and spilling the load to block the alley entrance. Immediately they start to work to clear the blockage, causing more chaos. Meanwhile the confused city guards arrive to conflicting tales from elves of the escapee running down the alley, and of pleadings for assistance from the work crew.

The players looking around amidst the confusion (if they are still standing there)

see the escapee peaking from the second floor window of an inn, the inn they have rooms at. In fact, it seems that the escapee has chosen to shelter himself in *their* room!

Mario Roccachi will plead for help from the players, asking them to help him get aboard a Heletian League bound ship. If they help him he will give them all his coin (minus his fare for the voyage, he has 121 Gold Crowns). He tells them of his miserable life as a slave and his need to escape before he is killed in the Arena. The catch is that his wealth, and private papers are held in the Arena, in an oaken box in his cell in the heavily secured pits beneath the main arena. The players will need to break into the Arena and retrieve it. If the players are quick to agree to help, let a reward be offered by the elven Arena officials for his return or information before he is safely aboard a ship. If your players are reluctant to get involved, have the gladiator be a distant acquaintance of one of their families.

Concealing Mario is one problem, entering the Arena another, but finding a Heletian merchant willing to risk the ill will of the elves could be their worst difficulty.

3. The Gods Are Dead - A young elf with the cocky air of a student approaches one of the players and thrusts a handbill into their hands. In perfect Heletian he says: "Come along. I think you'll find what you are looking for." Before the character has time to ask what this cryptic message means, the student turns away and melts into the crowd. The handbill is a lurid advertisement inviting the holder to:

A Spectacular Event.

A Night of Surprises For The Bold.

Eclectic Excitements and Food For Thought.

It instructs the "discretely curious" to assemble at midnight around the statue to Culann (God of Craftsmen, see WRC1) at the west end of the Mercantile Mile near the corner of the Street of Carters.

If the players decide to attend at the rendezvous point they will need to find a way to cross the city undetected as there is an unofficial curfew for non-elves in Yamere which allows the city guard to harass any humans out and about after dark.

At the Culann statue a wild-eyed Flet, Petter Borge, approaches them and offers them a "taste of something different" (a cake with lobeel root) for 3 Gold Crowns. Petter is obviously under the influence of some illicit substance, and wildly excited. If the players show Petter the handbill he will become animated, sell them a token (1GC) and detailed instructions on how to find the "Event". This is being held in an abandoned warehouse in Old Serhaem.

The token Petter Borge gave them will get them past the security at the door of the abandoned warehouse where the muffled noise of a rowdy crowd of revellers becomes a roar as they enter. Within, elves, humans, Saldaens, and even a few dwarves are sweating together in a converted storeroom whilst a band of minstrels entertain from a raised platform stage at the end of the warehouse that hangs over the waterfront.

The crowd contains mostly younger people - students, apprentices, even a few young nobles out enjoying the atmosphere of youth at play. There is a strong sense of anticipation in the air, and a shared feeling of rebellion. This is an opportunity for the players to make contacts in Yamere.

The main feature of the evening's entertainment is introduced about an hour after the players arrive - Descartao, a Cabalist. The colourful figure surmounts the stage area to a general hushing of the crowd.

"The gods are dead. The Ansilsae is a lie. High King Caemarou is a crazed, power-mad despot," he announces in a strong voice. Descartao then goes on to lecture at length how only faith makes the gods real, how the Ansilsae is a fool's dream, how elves are no more special than the other races of Unae, and how Caemarou's plans of a Fifth Dominion are doomed to a tragic failure that

will damn the elves. These words are high treason and many in the crowd become extremely nervous, but then a soothing note woven into the cabalist's words seems to calm them. The PCs also become enraptured by the speech, unless they have strong wills. Observant players notice a cowed feminine figure backstage concentrating on the crowd. She leaves as Descartao's harangue reaches a crescendo.

At that moment all hell breaks loose as an armed troop of city guards backed by cabalists bursts into the auditorium arresting all and sundry. Descartao waves his arms dramatically and all is plunged into darkness. The guard cabalists respond with a fireball directed at the stage! Screams of panic become screams of pain as the crowd goes wild and the guards start using brutal force. In the confusion the players would best be served by trying to escape through the stage area which leads out onto the waterfront. Here, many small vessels are tied up and it is possible that the players could either swim away or else commandeer a vessel.

The next day the city is buzzing with stories of the *massacre*: one hundred and eight unarmed young revellers cruelly slain by High King Caemarou's forces. A bitter day indeed for the rising Fifth Dominion. If the players investigate they discover that no cabalist by the name of Descartao is registered within the city, and the identity of the cowed women remains a mystery.

4. The Trek to Kaid-Onor - A Heletian scholar, Moric Spitteri, from the University of Vangre is looking for someone willing to guide him to the land of Kaid-Onor. No elf will guide him, all sneering at the idea of travelling to that forbidden land. A land of elves who have turned their backs on the Ansilsae Prophecy, claiming it has brought only suffering and misery to the elven people and others. In the end he must start asking humans to guide him, he feels defeated already in his quest as the chances of a human being able to get him to Kaid-Onor seems very slim. In desperation he will accept any offer, including your players who have not the faintest idea of how to get there, but after the Event (see The Gods Are Dead) might be looking for some safer employ beyond the city precincts.

Moric will be patient and wait for them to eventually discover that they can reach Kaid-Onor from the old mine just outside the mining city of Eccucanna. The information will be gathered by following a trail of hints, clues and suggestions from a dozen different sources. The enquiries of the players will unfortunately arouse the suspicion of the city guard, a situation that could become very dangerous, especially if they were seen at the warehouse revel.

was an island continent, Velsana! They flew as quick as they could, finally they spiralled down towards the island, gliding to where elven cities could be seen, their spires and pillar-towers rising above the lush greenery of Velsana's forests and jungle. The High Priests grew concerned, the forest of Velsana had long since been felled for timber. The vision must be showing them their homeland in the past, but no, their people's cities were here... this was a vision of the future.

Where were the elves?

The High Priests sped through the city, but all they found was encroaching jungle and empty buildings. They became separated but after a despairing time of searching again met near a gate leading out of the dead pillar-city. Without a word they followed the long silent road which lead into the dark heart of the forest. As the visionaries came to the end of the road they passed a marker that read "Ansilsae". One of the High Priest's voice drifted through the stillness that was only occasionally punctuated by crashing waves:

"Where are the elves?"

Here was every elf and the essence of the race. A field of sun bleached bones spread before them. Millions slept the eternal sleep of death, so many that the piles of bones made small hills, valleys and even a breakwater along the beach.

Here were the elves.

As the High Priests mourned the doomed future of their people, soothing divine voices called them to their feet, and back to the road. There had been another path, one more narrow than the road to Ansilsae. The High Priests as one ran down the unseen road, grabbing at any chance for a different future the elves could take.

Finally they arrived at the summit of a great mountain, and they sat down to rest. In the lands spread below them they became aware of great events.

Observing from their tall perch the High Priests watched the elven race decide on a different course. Instead of marching to the fields of Ansilsae they chose the narrow road. United they spread from Velsana, following the directions of their gods. The elves crossed over the ocean to the other lands of Unae and set about building one unified elven nation, a new dominion. The High Priests marvelled to see that together, as one, the elven race would rise, learning, as it travelled into the future, from its victories and its defeats.

The gods revealed four successive earthly dominions where the elves would

YAMERE

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 The Dockside | 15 The Arena |
| 2 The Docklands (Old Serhaem) | 16 The Markets |
| 3 Serhaem Prison | 17 Finsilsa Lake |
| 4 The King's Market | 18 The Avenue of Temples |
| 5 The Avenue of Magic | 19 The Mercantile Mile |
| 6 Old Yamere | 20 Old Finsilsa |
| 7 The Graves | 21 Velsana Vale |
| 8 Pool of the Past | 22 Kinreda Square |
| 9 Festival Square | 23 Pasinotis |
| 10 Commercial Areas | 24 Residential Areas |
| 11 Calbarae Bay | 25 Barracks |
| 12 The Cliffs | 26 Jorana Hills |
| 13 Garnamora Mountains | 27 The Maroklaran Sea |
| 14 The Rocks | |

- Pillar Towers:**
- 28 The Cabal
 - 29 The Sisterhood
 - 30 House Begonis
 - 31 House Fiquene
 - 32 House Jenn
 - 33 House Filbae Jala
 - 34 House Silvana
 - 35 House Komae
 - 36 House Cantos
 - 37 House Jhan
 - 38 House Fae Jora
 - 39 House Jilbae Kala

- Major Temples:**
- 40 Culann
 - 41 Dylann
 - 42 Pennardum
 - 43 Teteri
 - 44 Andrasta



TOURING THE SIGHTS OF YAMERE

A city the size of Yamere holds many attractions for visitors and traders. From the hustle of a dozen major markets to the blood tingling excitement of the Arena, from the picturesque views of Finsilsa Lake to the awesomely spectacular pillar-towers, from the ostentation of the Mercantile Mile district to the majesty of Temple Avenue, from the poverty of the Docklands to the wealth of the pillar towers, and from the wonderous effects of Magic Avenue to the calm beauty of Velsana Vale Yamere is a city of contrasts and rich diversity. It is a city of three hundred thousand souls.

The Dockside is one of the oldest areas of Yamere. The two mile stretch of wharves, warehouses, ghettos and neighbourhood markets make the area a very lively, varied and different place to the rest of the city. During the day the streets are crowded with workers, shoppers, merchants and seamen. At the night it is a lonely place populated only by vermin and gangs. Several cartels of ruthless criminals, the infamous *Crime Houses* of Yamere, run extortion and protection rackets in this aging district.

The Docklands is a small district of tight winding streets and alleys that can be found directly behind the oldest part of the dockside, it is also known as *Old Serhaem*. Here, all but one thousand of the forty thousand human labourers within Yamere cluster together within a dozen or so streets. The area, often refereed to as *Lae Lunae* or the *Ghetto*, is avoided by the elven population, not so much because of fear for personal safety (though that is a real threat) but because of the rundown and filthy nature of the ghetto. This is the only district of the capital that is unsewered. Here violent deaths, disease, malnutrition and poverty are commonplace. The only relief to this misery is supplied by a secret kirsh of Geilan (see *Fletland*, Iss 16) whose priestess, Mate Freida, tends to the sick and offers comfort to the poor.

The district is also home to many contact groups and organisations that deal discretely with the human traders who come into port. Slowly the word of their near slavery and damnation by the elves is escaping Yamere, soon all will know.

The Arena is one of the cultural hearts of Yamere. Here, once a week, up to thirty thousand citizens gather to watch competitions of strength, speed and battle prowess. The battles of the gladiators draw the biggest crowds lifting them into a fervour. Gladiatorial competition can take many forms; one on one competitions and

team events, or sometimes a team versus a large wild beast. Often the matches are to the death. The most common battles are between humans (Flets being a favourite inclusion) and elves. A real crowd pleaser is the monthly ogre match when one or two of the giant men are set against three times their number in a competition to the death. Two hundred years ago a small dragon was beaten by a troop of ten elven combatants in a display that was amongst the Arena's most spectacular. Annually great tournaments are held between Cabalists who unleash vivid displays of magic in a match up that is geared more towards drawing a reaction from the crowd than to injure each other.

Some gladiators gain fame and great wealth in the Arena (these are the wealthiest human citizens in Yamere), but all eventually meet death on the sands of the Arena floor where their wealth was made. The Arena represents an escape for humans, but one that is symbolic, not real. It's the only place in Yamere where a human can get away with talking and fighting back against his elven masters, but even this is a kind of slavery.

Finsilsa Lake dominates the city and is responsible for its unique structure and serene beauty. It is a large body of fresh water filled by dozens of springs which lie in the bed of the lake, and from a number of small streams that find their source in the surrounding hills and mountains. Never more than three yards deep the lake is lined completely on the bottom with foot-long lozenge shaped yellow rocks that give the lake its golden colour. These stones are considered a good luck charm for Yamere and it is treason for anyone to disturb or pilfer them. Disturbingly, someone has recently taken to etching anti-Camerou slogans on some stones that border the King's Market.

Many bridges and causeways have been built over the lake forming an intricate network carrying people to the buildings and sites of interest that rise from the lake bed.

The Markets. The city is dotted with many markets, a dozen majors and many smaller local strips of wheel barrows and stalls. Most commercial business in Yamere happens in the commercial districts around the Mercantile Mile, an avenue lined by retailing buildings (including the lower levels of some merchant houses' pillar towers). The street markets are less chaotic than those of Vangre, Porto Baimio and Nerva, but with just as much if not more variety. Seemingly anything can be sold or bought, and the area is also thronged with street entertainers of exceptional ability. The markets are the hub of Yamere and the best places for a newcomer to get a handle on what is happening in the city. This is where the rumour mill grinds its grist.

rise to awesome power only to fall each time upon their own swords. The gods promised that if each of these dominions was watched, the four great failings of the elven race would be divined and if the lessons were not forgotten they would leave the builders of the Fifth Dominion to become the rulers of all Unae. This final, global dominion would then, under the guidance of the gods, spread its wings to rule worlds beyond Unae.

The High Priests came out of the divinely inspired trance and raised flags of parley. While their kings demanded the flags be lowered the High Priests on both sides rode out to the middle of the battlefield. Passing through the carnage of the battle they were moved to tears and could see that the vision each had received was the same and a divine truth. They met briefly, discussed the vision, and on seeing the flags of parley being lowered by the two kings made ready for whatever may come. The advance began as the holy men reported to each king. In one voice they stood before King Kel Nagra and King Dia Albi and denounced them; "You by the grace of our gods have the right to rule over us but not to send us to unholy deaths killing our kin. That alone is the right of our gods." The High Priests then destroyed their monarchs in balls of fire, with bolts of holy lightning, demands of subservience and commands of death. As divine magic exploded at both ends of the battlefield the advancing troops faltered. On the command of the High Priests the retreat was sounded on both sides.

The first part of the vision at Ansilsae had shown the race wiping itself off the face of Unae. Elven culture, song, dance, art and lore all forever gone. The second part of the revelation showed an alternate future where elves would be the masters of all of Unae should they unite and learn from their mistakes. The priests, deeply moved, took every action to fulfil this promise.

Velsana was their birth place, but it had been outgrown. The elves would leave. Behind them they would abandon the past, but ahead lay the world of Unae and the promise of a glorious future.

Miraculously, great land bridges had risen from the ocean, and the High Priests were able to lead the united elven armies and their peoples east to the lush and open continents of Unae. We elves left Velsana forever. Legendary Velsana was barred to us by the gods who sent terrible storms, tidal waves and huge sea beasts to destroy the place of our birth and shameful adolescence.

Unity had come to the elven race.

The King's Market is the biggest in Yamere, its produce is the most costly and of the highest quality. This is the favoured market of the nobility, something that only helps maintain the high prices. It is here, on occasion, that the High King himself will descend from his pillar tower, the *Pasinotis*, to shop surrounded by his retinue followed by discrete guards and gawking citizens.

This is the best patrolled of Yamere's markets, and also attracts the finest street entertainment. The entire market is a flat square paved in the polished stones of the lake bed. It is set only inches above the waters of the lake, and has many narrow "streams" meandering through its paving criss-crossed by arched stone bridges. The stones of the market floor shine as if wet, and at sunset and sunrise it glows golden like the lake's waters, making it look as if traders and customers alike are walking on water.

A curiosity at the markets is Threepenny Jack, a beggar who always seems to be at the market before the stalls open and there at the end of the day, and always with the same three coins in his begging cup. The rumour is that Jack is a noble doing penance after committing a crime of passion in Camerou's court, and that is why his presence is tolerated in the King's Market.

The Avenue of Temples is one of Yamere's three great roads. It was originally a ferry route that took the faithful to the valley's major temples that were built outside the walls of the three young towns that later grew into Greater Yamere. From the shallows of Lake Finsala the temples were summoned, beyond the rule of the three cities so that all of the faithful could catch a ferry to prayer without fear or favour.

The Avenue of Temples is now an elevated walkway that crosses the lake's surface, with chapels, temples and shrines flanking it. Not every building here is of a spiritual nature, but the more magnificent the building the more likely that this will be the case. The avenue is often used for parades and ceremonies during the many religious festivals of the elven calendar.

The Avenue of Magic is a sparkling arcade that circles the northern half of Finsilsa Lake and is home to many wonders, not all of them magical. The chief faculties of the Yamere Cabal, their pillar towers in the Old Finsilsa district, and their university with its associated colleges and schools, are arrayed along the eastern end of this road.

The Cabal share the road with those who practice a different kind of enchantment, the entertainers. The west end through to the northern bend of the Avenue of Magic is home to Yamere's premier nightlife. It is this district that gives the Avenue its nickname, *Lae Quersic*, meaning *New Quersic* (Quersic being the capital of the

Second Dominion that fell through decadence and corruption). Here taverns, cafes, restaurants, travel inns, regal hotels, theatres, concert halls, children's matinees and a hundred other leisure activities rub shoulders, many of them illegal.

The Mercantile Mile covers a series of streets and runs across the middle of Lake Finsilsa. On most of its length it is lined with the pillar towers of the most powerful merchant houses of Wair-Rae, their shop fronts being the most prominent. Between these leading premises are numerous other lesser markets, workshops and trader stands offering every product and service imaginable. The Mercantile Mile is where a traveller should go to buy from a reputable dealer, at a premium price of course.

Old Yamere has been preserved as a historical precinct with a bohemian flavour. Much of the old port abandoned by the merchant seamanry that once thrived here is now taken over by a colourful colony of artists, actors, musicians, minstrels and the like who, with the fall of each night, head off to work in *Lae Quersic*. There are a number of small but thriving nightspots emerging in the Old Yamere district itself. This, the oldest part of Yamere, holds streets that are over two thousand years old. Hidden amongst the entertainers who have moved into the area is a growing number of hard core criminals, many active in the smuggling and narcotics trade, using links with Old Yamere's sewer system and the ogre clan catacombs underneath Kinreda Square. And evidence of gang warfare has emerged recently with disputes over the ownership of Old Yamere's most exclusive music hall and bawdy house, *The Gory Pirate*.

The Old Finsilsa district, although not with the same status as Old Yamere, has its own heart and has found its own way in the city of Greater Yamere. Where Old Yamere has become an artists' colony, Old Finsilsa has become a focus for the magic users of Yamere. Here the Cabal has much of its power base, and in the ancient winding streets many have taken up residence, so that the flashing of coloured lights, hooting and squealing of strange sounds, and the concussions of explosions and showers of sparks that occur through each and every night no longer draw even a remark except from incredulous visitors from the magiphobic Heletian League. Two hundred (two-thirds) of Yamere's cabalists are estimated to live in Old Finsilsa.

The Graves area holds a group of simple shrines devoted to each of the five sanctioned (legal) gods that are worshipped in Wair-Rae. Here the death ritual of passage is conducted, freeing the departed elf's spirit from its Naskae (soul pearl). The shrines are

set amongst beautiful parklands and wild gardens that are separated from the heart of Yamere by a ring of towering golden pines. In the woodland surrounds of this sanctuary the bodies of the dead are mourned and then buried in unmarked graves, giving them back to their world, Unae.

Velsana Vale is a circular park set upon a floating island made of elm timber that has been lined with rich soils and manures creating a garden vale of incredible beauty. Here giant willows drape their graceful branches into the placid waters of the lake. Beds of flowering perennials of rare beauty taken from across Unae give this place an air of tranquillity that even the Graves do not hold. The gardeners who tend this exquisite jewel in the crown of Yamere are said to have plant stocks from legendary Velsana that have been carefully nurtured down the millenia and planted in Velsana Vale to remind the elves of the splendour of their long lost homeland.

The Pool of the Past is at the heart of Velsana Vale. This round pool is actually an open section of Lake Finsala surrounded by the protective pontoon-island. It is considered a place for quiet contemplation. The edge of the pool is marked as sacred and the paved paths along the shoreline are etched with passages from the elves' holy book, the *Kae Ansilsa*. Each rest day a priest from one of the Kinreda faiths conducts a service speaking for the safe deliverance of the *Ansilsae* prophecy.

Kinreda Square, adjacent to the Arena, is most often used for festivals. It is also home to a daily market, that includes livestock and fresh produce. Beneath the square are the catacombs of a former ogre clan fortress town that had long since been abandoned before even the elves came to Wairanir. It was uncovered during the growth of the city and worked into the city's sewer network. Off the main tunnels are many chambers and natural caves. These are used by children, thieves, escaped human slaves and kultists who follow the *Terura Kala*. Accessible through the sewers and, rumour has it, directly from the Arena, the tunnels present many opportunities to those who have something to hide in Yamere.

Festival Square - This large square is used as extra space when the King's Market area is full or when a public ceremony is being performed. It is built on the lake shore and is raised one foot higher than King's Market which is just above the lake's water level. It is also used on occasions when several faiths from the Kinreda have festivals on the same day and both need access to Kinreda Square.

It is 516EK and Forwao's *Chronicle of Wair-Rae* will shatter Unae's Autumn dreams. ☉

LOST TREASURES

ELVISH ARTIFACTS FROM THE KAE ANSILSA

by Colin Taber and Adam Whitt

Today we elves stand at the dawn of the Fifth Dominion. Tomorrow we shall rule all Unae. So it is written. The Ansilsae is this word, the word that our holy men tell as divine truth. The Ansilsae is not merely a book of promises though, it also tells of our past, of times very real, with a strong link to today and the future. Many stories within this huge tome that is the original and complete Kae Ansilsa, now kept at Lae Bareth in Culann's temple there, tell of lost treasures that lay hidden, ready to be found again, that will aid the elves in our global, Final Dominion.

Forwao - Charlatan and The Chronicle of New Wair-Rae

The first Unae sourcebook, *The Chronicle of Wair-Rae* will be available in a matter of weeks. In this book Forwao tells the truth of elven history, elven faith in their divine rights, and of the *Ansilsae*, a prophecy that promises Unae to eternal elven rule, and dooms the non-elven races to slavery or death. The book details these things and the Dominion of Wair-Rae, a majestic empire rising as foretold in the *Ansilsae* eight thousand years ago.

The *Ansilsae* and the coming of the Fifth Elven Dominion is the central matter of this first *Chronicle*, meaning that various other related, but less important items have been excluded from the book. These items will see print over this and the next issues of *Australian Realms*. What can I say... we had too many words and not enough pages. Maybe one day we'll do a second volume of the *Wair-Rae Chronicle*.

A HISTORY OF MAGIC

Elven history is steeped in magic. From the first village and its shaman and minstrel, through the rise and fall of the four ruined Dominions and distant Velsana, elven magic was everywhere. Over the course of ten thousand years elven history has seen a steady stream of legendary magical artifacts produced by members of the Cabal, the Five Faiths, the two outlawed religions, the Sisterhood and renegade magicians. Some of the most famous of these artifacts, one from each fallen Dominion and one from Velsana, are detailed here: who created it, why, its powers and where it is today.

Enjoy.

THE SKULL OF SENA KALMA

Since the *Ansilsae Revelation* (year zero on the elven calendar) the elves have been exiled from their true home, Velsana, and the island continent has lain abandoned for over eight thousand years.

According to legend and religious lore, Velsana lies far to the west of Wair-Rae, if it still exists; Unae's seas have risen since that legendary era and no-one has dared to return. The Cabalists and members of the Sisterhood who scrye over the far horizon report no contact with anything in particular, but others do tell of a dark presence. Regardless of its shameful past, the land of Velsana birthed many treasures, the most famous being the *Skull of Sena Kalma*, a helm made from the skull of the renowned scholar following her execution.

Sena Kalma had warned of the dangers of overcrowding. As the elven population grew so too did its prosperity and peace, but eventually a point was reached where

the numbers became unsustainable. The small and isolated continent of Velsana had been a paradise, but after centuries of war and overpopulation it became a decrepit wasteland. Sena Kalma, and other farsighted scholars, foresaw this but her views were forcibly silenced by the rulers of her day.

The arrest and execution of Sena Kalma was undertaken by House Kalfena. This deed marked their emergence from petty nobility into the higher ranks of the elven court. Following the execution Kalma's skull was given to a priest of Dylann who fashioned it into a gold-rimmed helm. The craftsman priest carefully fractured the skull, enlarging the cranial cavity, before dipping it in molten silver making it a gruesome headdress. The helm was then embellished with gold trim and House Kalfena wore it as a symbol of their newly won, but shortly lost power. House Kalfena had no success at court and soon fell into ruin. The symbol of their unjust rule was taken from their ransacked estate by looters.

Since that time on Velsana, the Skull of Sena Kalma has reappeared throughout elven history, being touted in all of the past dominions. Why would someone bother to keep such a thing? The answers are three; firstly it is worth a small fortune, secondly there is great karma and honour in owning a relic of glorious Velsana, and thirdly it is said that the spirit of Sena Kalma resides in the helm. Any who wear the headdress one hour before sunset can commune with Sena (she was executed in a public beheading one hour before sunset). The lore surrounding the helm also suggests that smoking Qat (the Prabesk smoking leaf) or ingesting red wine blessed by a priest of Dylann will help make the possibility of contact with Sena more certain.

Contact with Sena's spirit is not always as clear cut as might be desired. Instead the Skull may offer only a circus of emotions and empathy, or a dreamlike

sequence of visions concerning the future and the holder's life. Rarely is contact with Sena as straightforward and easily understood as a one on one conversation with the scholar's resident spirit.

The helm was in the possession of the Jenn House prior to the rise of the third dominion. From there it seems to have moved to Fiquene House's treasury (most likely with the marriage between the two houses). From that time it is known that the Fiquene faction that fled to Wairanir in an effort to survive the third fall brought the famous helm with them. Since that time it has rarely been sighted or heard of. The Cabal in Wair-Rae say that the Fiquene House are using the Skull to divine the future and plot their treasons for they hope to claim the throne of the Fifth and Final Dominion. If it is indeed still in the hands of the Fiquene House, then it is more than likely within the city of Rumaza where the ghost of the betrayed leader of House Jenn, Grae Jenn, is now said to be haunting the head of House Fiquene, Jorin Fiquene.

ISKADAE ARMOUR

Seven thousand years ago Quo Ungria, the First Elven Dominion, achieved many great things; it was the first era when the elven race acted as a unified force. One of the most spectacular of these achievements was the equipping of the entire honour guard of King Grisja Quo with Winged Armour. Called *Iskadae Armour*, the suits were made by the Cabal as a gift for the king. Enemies of the Cabal like to point out that what King Grisja had to give in return, his entire kingdom, far outweighed the worth of the armours. Pure and pathetic paranoia!

One hundred suits of the magically enchanted armour were made, each giving the wearer the protection of plate armour but with the weight of leather. The suits also gave the wearer the ability to fly with silver-gilded metal wings that folded into the back plates of the armour. These enchanted wings were prepared for use by activating a release pin situated at the base of the breast plate. Once released the wearer only had to will themselves to fly and the carefully cast spells in the helmets were able to translate these mental commands into magical action. Needless to say, a suit by itself is useless if you do not have access to a helmet.

After the assassination of King Grisja

by his niece, Fae Cor (then matriarch of the Sisterhood), the disgraced honour guard (having failed their king) fled the falling dominion, reputedly taking the Iskadae Armours with them. Fae Cor, having deposed her uncle after six months of civil war was only then to preside over the smouldering embers of the First Dominion and a million corpses.

All but two of the honour guard (who had taken sides in the civil war) fled Quo Ungria and headed far south with their families and their precious armour. Nothing confirmed has ever been heard of the fleeing guards and their armour since.

The two honour guards who stayed to fight in the civil war were killed in battle, but their suits saved and handed on. One is today believed to lie in the ruins of Quersic Quor in Kalraith, the other is held in a display case in *Pasinotis*, the royal pillar tower in the capital, Yamere. The Cabal claims that the magic to make such a long-lasting and complex thing was only known to those who first produced the artifacts. Even the High King's closest allies in the Wair-Rae Cabal deny that they can make such an incredible treasure.

As word of the suit which is supposed to survive in Kalraith spreads, so too does the number of travelling parties who seek to claim this amazing magical prize. Many dangers await any who try to retrieve this suit from Quersic Quor, namely the *Scavenger* race and the *Spirit Queen* and her *Gargoyle* nation.

A quaint and easily dismissed footnote to this page in elven history is the belief of an obscure kult in Ungria, the *Uger Iskadae*, who foolishly maintain that they guard the other ninety-eight Iskadae Armours in a hidden sepulchre. They preach that the Final Dominion will bring a day of reckoning for the Sisterhood when the hidden suits will be dusted off, donned by the kultists and used to hunt down and slay the despised mind-warppers. These kultists, like so many others of their ilk, are demented witch-burners and of no account.

NANION NASKAE

Every elf has a *Naskae*, an organ that collects the raw stuff of magic during their lives. This misty blue sphere which is about an inch across is found inside the body just above the genitalia, buried deep in the flesh. It is also called the *Soul Pearl*. When an elf starts to follow the

corrupt kults of the *Terura Kala* (the elvish name for Horned God) the pearl changes to a deep and bottomless black.

Exposed followers of the *Terura Kala* are exiled from elven society. Many of these "faithful" are forced to leave Wair-Rae to enter the wilds of Kaid-Onor. There they join with others of similar persuasions who are known to the clans of Kaid-Onor as the *Mallum Kurtae* (the Lost Ones). Generally these kultists are hunted down when discovered by the Kaid-Onor clans, but sometimes their large numbers and the power of their priests are such that the kultists are left unmolested, allowed passage, or even given payments, stock and shelter, or whatever they demand. This weakness brings shame on Kaid-Onor.

Within Wair-Rae itself there are many who follow the *Terura Kala*. While never openly admitting such beliefs the signs can often be seen by those who know what to look for. A taint is on them.

There are fewer followers of the *Terura Kala* when compared to the general population than there are Horned God kultists within the Heletian League, but the elven kultists are more organised, with networks that span the whole nation and continents. With links to the Cabal and Sisterhood, the *Terura Kala* is the biggest known threat to the Fifth Dominion and the prophecy of elven supremacy. It is for this reason that its followers are so reviled by the rest of elvenkind.

With few restrictions on the practising of magic in Wair-Rae or its colonies (unlike the laws that drive magic wielders underground in the Heletian League) the priests of the *Terura Kala* can easily disguise themselves as Cabalists, openly performing their simpler and more sedate rites on the streets in the guise of charlatans. Unbeknownst to High King Caemarou his chief entertainer, the charlatan Waidormin, is actually a lowly priest of the *Terura Kala*, whose every performance in front of the High King curses his reign, gradually tainting the glory of the Fifth Dominion.

It is Waidormin who holds the artifact best remembered from the second dominion of Kalraith, it is the *Nanion Naskae*. The artifact is a set of five rubies, the stones all half an inch across and cut and polished to perfection. They come in a small purple velvet bag with a golden drawstring. These stones give their owner access to greater power, each being embodied with the spirit of six priests of the *Terura Kala* from the Second



Dominion, thirty six in all. To use the Nanion Naskae one must have access to spirit magic. Even then, one must be a very accomplished and strong priest in order to withstand the temptations and corruption of the Terura Kala priests who sacrificed their lives to be part of this terrible artifact. The artifact amplifies the user's basic magic ability by a factor of six, and also bestows six times your natural endurance. In the wrong hands, such as those of the charlatan Waildormin, it can do untold damage. It is probable that he keeps the Nanion Naskae on his person at all times.

THE SWORD OF ANDRASTA

The Third Dominion Jhae Dalin Cor's most famed enchanted artifact is a weapon known as the *Sword of Andrasta*. It was one of a host of blessed weaponry produced by the priests of that god. This particular sword is recognised as the finest elvish blade ever created.

The Sword was forged in the city of Dalin Cor by the legendary weapon smith Fores Bandanae, and blessed by the High Priestess of Andrasta so that no elf can directly harm its wielder by any means.

The Sword was spirited out of the third dominion a century before the third

fall, and sent to the eastern provinces of Ungria. There it was lost to its owner as payment of large gambling debt, an occurrence that saw it travel to the Kalraith Colonies, and from there with an enlisted man of the Dominion Military, it headed to the Southern Colonies where its owner was killed in battle. The sword is now wielded by the leader of the Southern Elven resistance to the rule of Wair-Rae: Jordo Danmorae is an eighty-two year old elf who has training in druidic magic, but also natural sword play abilities.

MERRAE'S BOW

It is hard to pinpoint what might be the most impressive magical artifact to be produced by such a recent dominion as the fourth, Old Wair-Rae, but it is most likely to be agreed upon by scholars and Cabalists to be *Merrae's Bow*. This lovingly crafted bow was created by High King Caemarou's tutor and mentor, Siverio Merrae. It is very accurate, very light but powerful and very quick to draw.

Merrae also prepared two score arrows that are said to fly undeniably true and *true to heart*, meaning (according to legend) that they will kill any they strike.

One quiver of a score of arrows is still held by High King Caemarou in Yamere. They are among his most

treasured possessions, reminding him of his dear departed friend, his parents and an age of childhood innocence so long ago taken away from him.

As for the bow, that was stolen from Caemarou, along with the other quiver of twenty arrows, three years ago during a royal reception in Yamere. The thief was never found, the only clue being a broken bottle of Flet ale by the weapon's display case, and a trail of crumbed fish that lead to a window on the sixty-eighth level of the Pasinotis pillar tower.

While not widely known, and certainly not within the borders of Wair-Rae, the bow and quiver of arrows was stolen by the young son of an Heletian diplomat. When the incident was discovered by the thief's distraught father he sent him immediately back to Greater Baimiopia to hide the items in the family manor. Two years later, upon the end of his posting in Wair-Rae, the diplomat returned home to Thapsuss and sold the bow and quiver on to the then Reganto of Vangre, Vincenzo Heletiano. Witnesses at last year's "Siege of Vangre" believe they saw an adventurer in Heletiano's employ using the bow to defend the walls, as one arrow from this archer was seen to instantly slay the Great Ogre Shaman, Garrekk, piercing his protective magics.

☉ It is 516EK and Autumn awaits.

IN LOVE WITH THE NIGHT MYSTERIOUS

Love & Passion in Vampire: The Masquerade

By Richard Watts



*"In love with the night mysterious,
The night when you first were there,
In love with the joy delirious,
The thought that you might care.
So taunt me and hurt me,
Deceive me, desert me,
I'm yours till I die.
So in love, so in love,
So in love with you am I."*

- Cole Porter, "So In Love"

Love is one of the strongest emotions mortals ever feel. It afflicts the hardest of hearts, and ensnares both beggars and kings. Although no longer counted among the living, the Kindred are by no means immune to love. Here are presented two short stories about different kinds of passion, featuring two unique characters. These stories are designed to be fitted into any **Vampire** chronicle (they could also be adapted to fit **Vampire: The Dark Ages** or even the **Ravenloft** setting for the **Advanced Dungeons and Dragons™** game), running independently or concurrently. The characters whose actions these stories are centred upon might be met on any night, in any place frequented by Cainites.

THE LOVE OF GOD

*"Like falling angels,
The world disappears into the fire,
Is it always like this?"*

- The Cure, "Siamese Twins"

Chelemond is a fallen angel. Once he sang hosannas before the throne of God. Once he was an agent of the Divine, numbered amongst the Heavenly Host. Once he soared between suns on great white wings, and listened with joy to the music of the spheres. But that was eons ago, before the civil war led by Lucifer Morningstar divided Heaven.

It was Chelemond's sin to side with neither Lucifer, nor the Army of God led by the Archangel Michael. Not quite corrupted by Morningstar's seductive words, Chelemond was still sullied. No longer pure, he fell, although not as far as Hell. Neither angel nor devil, he walks between Heaven and the Pit, trapped in the drab realm which is the Earth.

Chelemond is tall and strong-boned, possessed of an androgynous beauty. His blonde hair is tousled and unwashed, his blue eyes red from weeping. Once clad in the whitest of robes, he now dons clothing torn and stained, sneakers, dirty jeans and loose sweaters. Were it not for the bleeding stubs of his wings, which he hides beneath his clothing, and his rippling aura of gold shot through with pink and silver-blue, Chelemond could pass as an ordinary, if beautiful, 21 year old.

After thousands of years wandering the mortal world, mourning both his fall from grace, and the suffering of mortals, Chelemond has hit upon a way whereby he might achieve redemption. Were he to bring one more accursed than himself into God's embrace, Chelemond hopes, he might be forgiven his sins. Who better to save than one of the Damned?

Having observed the characters from a distance for some time, Chelemond will eventually approach them. Before he does, alert vampires may have gained an inkling of his existence. Perhaps scanning a crowd with Auspex hoping to spot another vampire, they are dazzled by an aura of blinding white. While sleeping away the day, they might dream of the sound of wings, and of enfolding, reassuring arms. Perhaps employing the Spirit's Touch, the characters pick up impressions of overwhelming compassion tinged with sorrow, and a deep yearning for something beyond reach, radiating from someone nearby.

When he finally reveals himself, Chelemond may do so in a bar or a nightclub, or perhaps upon the street. He may show himself briefly, encouraging the characters to follow him, whereupon he leads them to a church, confronting them in the house of God. The characters might even meet him while hunting. Allowing himself to be stalked, Chelemond willingly offers up his blood, that it might wash away a character's sins. The blood of angels is a heady brew. It gives twice the blood points of an equal draft of mortal vitae, restoring a lost Humanity point in addition, although this latter benefit is lost if Chelemond's blood is taken by force. Indeed, if the angel's blood is stolen, each point imbibed destroys a corresponding point of Humanity, as well as inflicting a level of aggravated damage.

Once he has contacted the characters, or a character, Chelemond will attempt to guide them towards God's love. He will spend long hours talking with them, hearing their confessions and teaching them of redemption and hope. He may tell them of his own hopes, or he may not, depending on the level of trust engendered between them.

As well as offering them his blood, the fallen angel will present the characters with situations which test their humanity and compassion. Chelemond might ask the characters to work with a predatory child molester who was himself a victim of abuse, and who collapses in tears when confronted with his long-buried memories. Acceptance is the beginning of healing, and Chelemond might ask the characters to become the molester's guardian angels, as the man attempts to confront and deal with his crimes. The homeless, the lost, the unloved and the unlovable; Chelemond will ask the characters to extend their sympathies to all, and is rigorous in his testing of the character's morals and inner strength.

It may be that the angel attempts to goad the characters into frenzy, the better that they might know their Beast, and master it. He might also introduce the vampires to creatures worse than themselves, such as the succubus Gulfora from *Chicago By Night*, or to individuals with True Faith, such as Reverend Terrance Coleman from *The Succubus Club*, in order that they may better understand the nature of good and evil.

When at least one character has had their Humanity raised to 10 by drinking Chelemond's blood, and have undergone much suffering, ultimately discovering redemption, perhaps even taking the first steps towards Golconda, the fallen angel will consider his task done. Whether or not he is readmitted to Heaven, or whether, spurned, he becomes his own, and the now-saintly characters worst enemy, remains entirely the decision of the Storyteller.

Chelemond, a Partially Fallen Angel

Nature: Caregiver

Demeanour: Loner

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 5, Stamina 4

Social: Charisma 5, Manipulation 1, Appearance 5

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 5, Wits 5

Talents: Alertness 2, Athletics 3, Dodge 3, Empathy 5, Leadership 2, Streetwise 2

Skills: Animal Ken 5, Etiquette 4, Music 5, Stealth 5

Knowledges: Law 3, Medicine 3, Occult 5

Disciplines: Animalism 4, Auspex 5, Obfuscate 2, Presence 1

Faith: 8

Backgrounds: Allies 1

Virtues: Conscience 5, Self Control 4, Courage 5

Humanity: 10

Willpower: 8

Roleplaying Hints: You are one of God's fallen children. You are compassionate, saintly, gentle and kind. You pay for the sins of your past with your penance upon this miserable lump of clay. You have the air of a martyr about you, and are prone to arrogance, although you try to repress this. When you remember, you are smitten with sorrow at the suffering of humanity, although it is more often your own suffering that you dwell upon.

Notes: When Chelemond employs his presence, he becomes surrounded by a nimbus of white light. His faith allows Chelemond to cause occasional miracles, although never for his own ends. Being banished from Heaven, Chelemond may not dismiss demons nor lay ghosts to rest. His faith repels vampires only should he will it so, and even then, the Cainite may attempt to resist via a Willpower roll. Chelemond may temporarily change a person's Nature by willing it. The angel's ally is Father Brian O'Donnell, a priest from a poor part of town, whom the angel saved from the bottle and a loss of faith.

LOVE GONE WRONG

*"He was sad and sweet, and his large eyes
Were strange with wondrous brightness, staring wide
With gazing; and he sighed with many sighs
That moved me, and his cheeks were wan and white
Like pallid lilies, and his lips were red
Like poppies, and his hands he clenched tight,
And yet again unclenched, and his head
Was wreathed with moon flowers pale as lips of death."
-Lord Alfred Douglas, "Two Loves"*

On a still winter's night, as one of the characters walks down a quiet street, the softly falling rain like tears on their cheeks, they pass a young man with haunted eyes. He asks for a cigarette, and then, asks if the character will buy him a drink. If they say no, or go to walk on, he takes hold of their arm and again, softly, asks if they will please buy him a drink. "I'm lonely," he says, "I just need someone to talk to."

The young mortal's name is Cameron Lowe. Aged in his mid-twenties, his head is shaved save for a scalp-lock of tangled blue and black dreads. Both his ears, and his nose are pierced, and he wears ragged black clothing and heavy boots beneath his thick greatcoat. His aura is silver, through which swirl countless other colours, too swiftly to be recognised.

In the warmth of a nearby bar, Cameron speaks rapidly, tripping over his words in his eagerness to communicate. He tells the character that he is a poet, although unpublished. For over a month, he has suffered from writer's block; unable to write, he has taken to long, late night walks. "Do you know what it is like," he says, clutching his head, "to have all these ideas in your mind, but be incapable of getting them out? Sometimes I think my head will burst from the pressure."

Over the next hour, Cameron talks of his ambitions, how as a child he always knew that he was different to the other children at his school. He wanted to be someone special, someone unique, not part of the numb grey herd that shuffle through the streets between home and work. It should become apparent during the increasingly one-sided conversation that Cameron is not entirely stable, although he does not seem to be dangerous, unless possibly to himself.

If the character is understanding and sympathetic towards him, Cameron will eventually ask them home, "to hear some of my poetry," he says. Cameron's apartment is on the top floor of a decrepit tenement building. He lives in a single room, the walls crammed with peeling posters, the floor littered with books, discarded clothing, and over-flowing ashtrays. The smell of stale marijuana smoke hangs thick in the air. an old, slow word-processor sits beside the bed; it is Cameron's most treasured possession, and his fingers glide across its keys lovingly as he talks.

A thick sheaf of poems rests atop the computer, which the young man thrusts upon his visitor almost as soon as they are through the door. Almost all Cameron's poems are concerned

with the topic of love: unrequited love, passionate love affairs gone horribly wrong, love that ends in tears, betrayed love, corrupted love. They are written in a strong and original voice, but one choked with tears.

Cameron soon makes it clear that he wants the character to stay the night. He strips off his clothes, and sits, naked and shivering, beneath the stark light. He is painfully thin. Long, jagged scars run down his forearms. If the character is hesitant, or refuses to stay the night, Cameron begs them to stay. It is not sex he wants, he tells them, but contact with another human being. "Hold me," he says, plaintively. "Please. Just hold me."

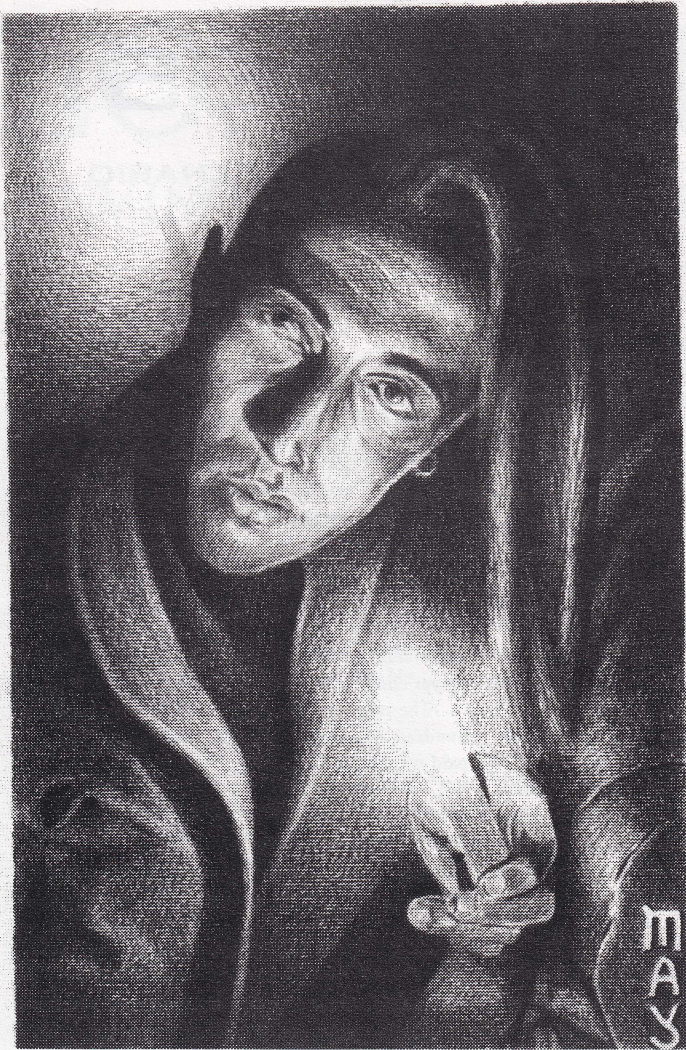
Cradled in the character's arms, Cameron cries himself to sleep. No doubt they drink from him, enough to sate their appetite, not enough to kill, and slip away before dawn. If they do not, perhaps not even going back to his apartment with Cameron in the first place, the young poet writes a passionate verse about them as soon as he gets home. The poem will be hopelessly desperate and yearning, as the contact between Cameron and the character was so fleeting.

The following night Cameron seeks them out. It may take him hours, but guided by some inner vision, he will eventually find the character no matter where they are. His eyes are feverish, and he clutches a new poem, which he thrusts at them as soon as they meet. Excitedly, Cameron says that when he awoke, finding them gone (or when they otherwise left him) he wrote a new verse, the first thing he has written in weeks. The poem, entitled "A Stranger," is an aching lament for lost possibilities. It lays Cameron's emotion's painfully bare.

The young mortal now proceeds to become hopelessly infatuated with the character. Over the next few nights he follows them around, turns up at awkward moments, declares his undying love for them at every opportunity. Obsessive, he starts to talk of their future, of them meeting his parents, the tow of them going on holidays together. He laughs if the character tries to gently brush him off; to get rid of Cameron, they must be brutal.

If the character makes their feelings clear, Cameron looks stunned. Tears well up in his eyes, his lip trembles. Over and over again, he says, "But I love you," as if the words are a spell that can make everything perfect between the character and him. Eventually, unable to speak, Cameron flees. The last the character sees of him is an anguished backward glance, his eyes huge and dark in his pale face. That night, Cameron commits suicide. Unless the character looks for him, his body is not found for over a week, until his landlord comes for Cameron's overdue rent and discovers the fly-blown corpse. Humanity rolls may be called for, if the Storyteller considers the vampire to be suitably affected by the poet's death.

Alternatively, the character may wish to embrace him. If this course of action is followed, the Embrace disturbs Cameron further. While he revels in his new state, his actions become even more demented. Seeing the Embrace as the act of a true lover, his passion for the character grows out of all proportion. He may become insanely jealous, or go so far to impress them



In addition, perhaps Cameron's mother or sister track the character down, having heard of them from the obsessive mortal in the days leading to his death. The bereft relatives search for understanding, unable to comprehend that Cameron would take his own life. His relatives question the character about their relationship with the youth, ask if they were lovers, if an argument between them was what drove Cameron to suicide. The mourning family may grow angry, blaming the character for the youth's death, or they might only want to know what passed between Cameron and the character, in order to better understand how the boy could do what he has done.

The only way for the character to rid themselves of Cameron's ghost is to publish his poems. This will not be easy. Publishers will reject the poems as too naive, too cynical, too dark. No-one will want to read them, they say. A publisher must be Dominated into accepting the work of Cameron Lowe. When the slim, black-bound volume of poetry is published, it meets critical acclaim, going through several editions, and hailed as a classic example of modern alienation. All who read the book agree that the most powerful piece in the posthumous collection is the young author's final poem, entitled, "A Stranger." Cameron's ghost will be laid to rest once the character places a copy of the book on his tombstone.

that he repeatedly breaks the Masquerade, or stirs up the Jyhad, becoming a liability to the character. The Prince of their city may even order Cameron's death. Furthermore, once he is Embraced, Cameron writes no more poems. Over time this also wreaks havoc upon his disordered mind, and Cameron becomes suicidal.

Regardless of the manner of his death, the character now becomes haunted by Cameron's ghost. Only they can see the spectre, a thin, translucent figure, face a mask of tragedy, each wrist a lipless wound weeping red tears. The ghost reaches out towards them beseechingly, mouth forming the silent phrase, "I love you." The character sees the ghost each morning as they sink into sleep, and each night as they arise. After a week of this, sleep begins to elude them, as the stress of the situation has its effect. They must spend a blood point each morning to force themselves asleep. His voice begins to haunt their dreams, and his tears still echo in their ears each evening as they awake to see the dead poet's agonised and imploring face. His visage is glimpsed reflected in windows, looking sorrowfully over their shoulder. Anyone using Auspex in the character's vicinity hears nothing but weeping, and use of the Spirit's Touch while they are near is blocked by the sense of overwhelming sorrow that surrounds them.

Cameron Lowe, Mortal

Nature: Loner

Demeanour: Fanatic

Physical: Strength 1, Dexterity 2, Stamina 1

Social: Charisma 1, Manipulation 1, Appearance 1

Mental: Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 2

Talents: Empathy 2, Pan-handling 2, Poetic Expression 5, Streetwise 2

Skills: Music 3, Stealth 2, Survival 2

Knowledges: Computer 2, Occult 2

Disciplines: None

Backgrounds: Resource 1

Virtues: Conscience 3, Self Control 1, Courage 3

Humanity: 7

Willpower: 6

Notes: After death, Cameron is motivated by misery. He is a weak ghost, able to materialise only twice a day, and otherwise unable to influence the physical world, save to appear before the object of his sad, obsessive passion.

FREE THE SLAVES!

PART ONE OF AN EXCITING TWO-PART SOLSPACE™ SCENARIO

BY JONATHAN A. SPEAR

"Abused, beaten, forced to work until they die. These are the hidden slaves of the Belt. Look at those lacerations and bruises- are they caused in the course of normal labour? Of course not!

The Belt mining companies treat prisoners worse than cyberforms, beating them until they work for twenty hours a day in the lethal vacuum of the asteroid mines.

Human rights? Ignored.

UN inquiries? Ignored.

Consolidated Asteroid Mining. Guilty! The Andrei Base has a prisoner casualty rate of seven men and women per day. Those prisoners are dead. Sentenced to labour in the asteroid mines, those convicts who labour under CAM's stun rods are given a virtual death sentence! Some labourers are not even convicts - they are slaves who are bought from unscrupulous criminals and forced to labour for the profit of the corporation!

Belt Mines Inc. Guilty!

Solar Mines. Guilty!

Enough is enough. The time for change is now! Free the Slaves!"

"Free The Slaves" Media Campaign
- Amnesty Interspatial.

THE ADVENTURE

The players are hired by Amnesty Interspatial to ensure the safety of an offshoot group of radical activists in the Belt, who call themselves "Free The Slaves". Having arrived in the Belt, on the asteroid of Ceres, the AI team find that they are too late to help "Free The Slaves", whose office is blown up before their eyes! Having cleared themselves of any blame, they are recruited by the local UN Marshall to help investigate the bombing, which is eventually linked to Consolidated Asteroid Mining (CAM), with possible Rover involvement. The adventure then moves to CAM's main asteroid prison mine, Andrei, where further links to Rovers, the bombing, and human rights abuses may be discovered. Finally, if the player are brave and competent, in Part Two of this scenario they may be able to discover the secret base of The Claws, a Rover clan, and foil an alliance between these piratical scum and the feared Cyborgs of Mercury!

AMNESTY INTERSPACIAL

Amnesty Interspatial was formed in 2025, after the brutal repression of the attempted colonial revolution at Isidis Base. Seeing the growing number of human rights violations that were occurring throughout SolSpace's various growing points of habitation, Amnesty Interspatial began to regularly report such deep space violations to the UN. Amnesty International were bombed out of their London headquarters in 2014, and are now based in New Zealand where they help to co-ordinate the activities of Amnesty Interspatial in orbit and beyond.

Constantly short of funds and skilled personnel, AI often hire freelance edgerunners to undertake particularly risky, difficult or sensitive tasks. Unsurprisingly, AI are an extremely controversial organisation who are sometimes actively persecuted by corporations, governments and criminals - often with violent results.

Some more radical members of AI have formed a new front called "Free The Slaves", its avowed aim to release all inmates of prison and slaves mines, by force of arms if necessary. Having recently opened offices on the asteroid Ceres, "Free The Slaves" are planning to run a very frank media campaign against the three big corporations who AI allege are responsible for treating prison and slave miners with "heartless brutality". Unsurprisingly, the more moderate members of AI are concerned that "Free The Slaves" are taking a too radical approach, and may have bitten off more than they can chew.

RECRUITMENT

In order to ensure the continuing safety of the radical "Free The Slaves" activists, the co-ordinators of AI wish to send a team to investigate the security of the radicals on Ceres. Given that the activists received seven death threats on the first day that they arrived, the AI co-ordinators believe that the new anti-prison and slave mining offices on Ceres will need tight security in order to operate.

Enter the player characters! Wherever they may be, whether the battle zones of the Olympus Fringe, the slums of Luna, or the void of deep space, Ricky "The Ferret" Cavanaugh (see Non Player Characters) will find them. An amiable but deadly field operative for AI, Ricky will approach the player characters and offer them "a lil' bitta work, ya know, almost like an 'oliday sorta". AI wish to hire them because (a) they are well known as reliable operatives, or (b) they are cheap, depending on the background, experience and reputation of the group.

What's the job? AI want the player characters to travel out to Ceres asteroid in the Belt with Ricky, to assess and maintain the security of the "Free The

Slaves" group. Despite the fact that they disapprove of the radical fringe, the AI leaders have many friends and former associates who are now working for "Free The Slaves", and they do not want to see their comrades dead! AI are willing to foot the bill for the transport of the characters to and around the Belt, their meals and accommodation on Ceres, vital equipment such as space suits, and any other equipment which Ricky (i.e. you, the referee) deems to be vital for their task. The duration of employment by AI is negotiable, depending on the ongoing need for the player characters as security consultants on Ceres.

The remuneration for the job is not huge, a few hundred eurobucks each per day plus expenses, paid weekly, but as Ricky will point out: "Bleedin' 'ell, we're not Arasaka ya know! We're AI, defenders of the weak and innocent! Any'ow, watcha complainin' 'bout, ya get free fares out ta the Belt. Once ya there, ya can make a killin' doin' what ya like after ya've finished workin' for AI". As the referee, feel free to alter the deal, within reason, if the players seem hesitant to take up Ricky's offer. Perhaps the player characters will even do the job for AI cheaply, out of the goodness of their hearts! Excuse me? Goodness in the hearts of Cyberpunks? Ha, ha, ha!

Ricky will demand that the team leave for Ceres the very next day, giving the player characters only a little time to conclude any business that they have at their current location, and to prepare for the coming job.

CERES BOUND

The trip out to the Belt and onto Ceres gives the referee (you!) a chance to indulge his whims and make creative use of previously published SolSpace material in *Australian Realms* and *Deep Space*. Surely the trip won't be uneventful?! What about motion-sickness, pressure leaks, faulty equipment, Rover harassment, getting through Customs with all those implanted cyber-weapons, radiation storms, RUK Space Marine surprise searches, rogue asteroids, crazy merchants or smugglers, and the trip through the Theodorsen Gateway? Make things interesting and use your imagination and knowledge of the SolSpace background! In SolSpace, nothing is ever easy, safe and unchallenging!

Eventually, Ricky and the player characters should arrive at the dim, dirty and crowded Algernon base on Ceres (see issue 27). Upon entry to Algernon, the player characters will have to pass through a search by the private base security company - none other than an orbital subsidiary of Arasaka! The player characters had better hope they've done nothing in the past to blatantly "frag off" the Boys in Black! Any illegal equipment or weaponry that the player characters have, including weaponry that is inappropriate and

dangerous to use in space, will be temporarily or permanently confiscated (or deactivated in the case of cyberwear). Appropriate sidearms such as flechettes, bolters, gyrojets and blades are permitted in Algernon.

Ricky has booked a large room for the AI team to operate from in a cheap and dirty little hotel simply called "The Rock" close by the shipping docks of Algernon. Ricky suggests that the team settle into their accommodation, then quickly check out the new "Free The Slaves" offices near the casino and Strip (around ten minutes walk away).

Having settled into their shady but reasonably secure hotel room, it's time to see the site that the team have travelled so far to protect. A ten minute stroll through the crowded and dirty halls of Algernon will put the player characters in the busy casino and Strip area - within sight of the new "Free The Slaves" headquarters. However, the mission is about to take a slightly unexpected turn...

KABOOM!!! When the player characters are around 40 meters away from the small, glass-fronted "Free The Slaves" office, a massive explosion rips through the building and the surrounding Strip area! With an explosive radius of around 25 meters (plus 10 meters of shrapnel), the player characters are blown off their feet, scratched by flying shrapnel and slightly singed by the heat of the explosion, but otherwise unharmed.

Stunned, surrounded by flaming debris and ears ringing, the player characters may be able to make

out a shrill screaming sound. Those with deep space experience will recognise this sound as being that of the local atmosphere rapidly escaping into the vacuum of space! Despite the fact that this area of the Strip was below the surface of the asteroid, the explosion created several small holes between the pressurised Algernon base and the void outside. Any players with an ounce of sense will realise that it is time to leave the area quickly, before it is sealed off by emergency blast-doors. The nearest blast-door is 20 meters away and will close in 30 seconds, giving enough time for the team to escape the vacuum if they can fight their way through the hysterical fleeing crowd. Any character who fails to escape the area and cannot find a space suit will discover first-hand the adverse effects of dropping air pressure within a short time.

Having (hopefully) escaped the explosion and depressurisation, the AI team will be rapidly arrested by the base Arasaka security troops. As suspicious, recently arrived strangers who were seen fleeing from the area of the bombing, the player characters are high on the list of potential perpetrators. The security troops will be polite but firm in their manner, but any attempt to resist or escape arrest will be viewed as an admission of guilt - and will be met with pursuit and "termination with extreme prejudice"! If the AI team go quietly with the Arasaka troops, they will be placed in a high-security holding cell until the Algernon UN Marshall arrives for questioning.

It seems that the player characters arrived just too late to ensure the safety of the "Free The Slaves" activists! The effects of the bombing were devastating. 37 people were killed in the blast and subsequent vacuum, including all the "Free The Slaves" activists on Ceres, as an important strategy meeting was in progress at the time. Their office was utterly destroyed by the explosion, as were several surrounding buildings in the Strip. Authorities estimate that the damage will cost millions of eurobucks to rectify, and will damage the Algernon Strip's popularity around the Belt. No one claims responsibility for the blast - it looks like the player characters are in trouble!

WHODUNNIT?

UN Marshall Andreas Dukovi (see Non Player Characters) has the questionable honour of clearing up the messy investigation into the bombing. Dukovi will arrive at the player's holding cell, tired and extremely annoyed that such an act of terrorism has occurred on "his base". The Marshall knows, through various sources, who the player characters are and that they are working for AI. He is, however, still extremely suspicious of the team and is actively looking for a scapegoat to blame for the bombing and quickly tie up the investigation. Now is the time for some inspired reasoning and roleplaying by the players, in order to persuade Dukovi of their innocence. Ricky will aid their



PRISONS IN SPACE - Life as a Prisoner in 2037

The rise in crimes among the space and earth populations has seen the need for larger prison facilities. The Gateways have enabled transportation of long-term prisoners quickly and cheaply.

At first, penal colonies were set up on Mars and Luna. However, it was soon realised that these prisoners could serve society much more usefully as labour. Thus the Prison Mines of the Belt were established.

The Belt mines are run by private corporations, with regular audits by the UN to ensure no undue harshness or dangers are allowed to risk prisoner lives. In actuality, life in the Prison Mines is brutal and deadly. Few survive longer than 3 to 4 years, and those that are paroled are typically broken men and women.

Controlling Prisoners: Keeping the prisoners under control relies on a number of elements. The first is the harsh environment. Outside of the mines and barracks is the cold vacuum of the asteroid belt. There are no ships permanently at the mines - cargo vessels, prison transports etc all arrive and leave within 24 hours. Most mines have a monthly shipment of new prisoners and supplies, and a cargo out of refined ores and paroled prisoners.

The second common element is explosive collars. Locked around the neck, a collar can be detonated by either remote control or by crossing the perimeter markers of the mine. Only the mine warden and his guards have the remote controls, as well as guns and tasers for regular crowd control. Each collar has a unique code to activate and deactivate/unlock it. This code is usually stored in the base computers, heavily encrypted to prevent unauthorised access. Typically, only the mine warden, the chief security officer, and one or two chosen deputies will know the access codes to deactivate a collar.

A third control element is the trustee system. If a prisoner helps the guards do their jobs (ie: snitch on fellow inmates, reveal hidden items etc) then they get easier duties and maybe even reduced sentences. On some mines, trustees are even armed with stun rods and shields.

Escaping: Few people have ever managed to escape from a prison mine without external assistance. Most escapes actually occur from the ships carrying the prisoners to the mine, when a pirate or Rover clan ship attacks. These attacks are to rescue specific individuals, or sometimes to recruit members. Often the balance of the prisoners

plight by offering to help investigate the bombing - whether the players like it or not! The team will be released the day after the bombing on two conditions. Firstly, they must not leave Algernon without Dukovi's permission, and must report to him daily. Secondly, he takes the team up on Ricky's offer. It seems that the player's mission has changed, as they must now find out "whodunnit?"

If they have been reasonably polite and helpful, Dukovi will provide the players with the current investigative report on the bombing. Amongst the bureaucratic jumble, the players will find the following possibly useful information:

THE UN REPORT

(a) Of the 37 bodies recovered from the blast area and vacuum outside, only 36 of the victims have been identified. The 37th body remains in the local mortuary awaiting identification.

(b) The type of explosive used in the bombing was not the common C-6, but rather, a rare variant called C-9, according to the UN forensics team. C-9 was designed for deep space mining, requiring little oxygen in order to detonate effectively, but is hideously expensive.

(c) Several witnesses reported seeing a large man with tattoos on his face being sucked into the void during the depressurisation after the blast. The same witnesses swear that the man was smiling and laughing hysterically! UN investigators are regarding this report rather dubiously, as no corresponding body has been recovered.

(d) The explosion was centred exactly outside the "Free The Slaves" office, yet no trash cans, drains, boxes, vehicles or other possible receptacles for the bomb were reported outside the building prior to the blast. Yet, UN forensics experts insist that the explosion was caused by a stationary bomb detonated at ground level, not a rocket or grenade.

Armed with such preliminary information, it is now up to the players to ascertain who they believe was responsible for the brutal killing of so many people. Whilst it is impossible to predict all the various means by which they may investigate the bombing, there are several avenues of exploration which seem likely, and may be suggested by Ricky:

Investigating the Bombing Site: The bomb crater and "Free The Slaves" office has been partitioned from the remainder of the Strip, and is under guard by RUK Space Marines. A combined Interpol, UN and RUK investigation and forensics team is slowly combing through the rubble in search of further clues. The office itself was utterly destroyed in the explosion, and the subsequent vacuum irrevocably sucked much prospective evidence into the void, leaving precious few clues. With the permission of Marshall Dukovi, the Marines will let the PCs into the partitioned area, on condition that they do not overly hinder the investigative team. If they choose to search through the wreckage around the ruined building and large crater, make an Awareness/Notice roll for each player character (Difficulty 20+), to determine whether they spot an unusually bright and gleaming metallic fragment that is embedded in one of the ruined walls of the destroyed office.

Upon extraction, the bent and scratched fragment will appear to be a small serial number plate, upon which is engraved: "CYMERC-70316/MINEX". If the fragment is analysed, it will prove to be an extremely resilient alloy named Mercusteel, which is produced only from the mines of Mercury. Exhaustive enquiries into stock and

shipping records, manufacturing codes, production licensing and other relevant areas may allow interpretation of the serial number. "CYMERC" is a Mercury-based cybernetics and cyberform manufacturing company, and "MINEX" is a class of small (50cm cube) wheeled cyberform that is used by mining companies for surveying purposes. Further enquiries (Difficulty 25+) will reveal that this particular unit, "70316", was registered to Consolidated Asteroid Mining (CAM). Why was a CAM surveying cyberform in the Strip of Algernon when the bomb went off? Could the bomb have been concealed in the cyberform? CAM officially denies all knowledge of the MINEX unit, and claims that all of its cyberform are accounted for.

The Unidentified 37th Body: The player characters may wish to visit the Algernon mortuary, in order to view the body that was mentioned in the UN report. The body is a mess, having been struck by shrapnel from the blast, then exposed to the resulting vacuum. A young male, the victim was wearing industrial coveralls, under which was a black skinsuit, several mono-knives, and a large bolt pistol. The pistol and knives both have small red claw symbols embossed upon them, whilst if a button near the collar of the skinsuit is depressed, the drab black garment lights up with a multitude of similar flashing red claws. The other noteworthy fact about the victim is that he has six fingers on his left hand and an unusually elongated body, perhaps suggesting that he was a Highrider.

Inhabitants of the Strip may be questioned about the unidentified man, but there is nothing of value that can be gleaned. However, if the claw insignia is mentioned to someone on the Strip or a law enforcer, they will become reticent to speak and attempt to leave. If pressed, someone may reveal that the claw symbol is that of the anarchistic rogue Rover clan, *The Claws*. Is it mere coincidence that a member of this outlawed clan risked entering Algernon and was unluckily caught in the explosion, or could *The Claws* be involved?

The C-9: Given that the initial investigative report states that the explosive used in the bombing, C-9, is rare and expensive, the PCs may wish to investigate its origins. If local miners and other inhabitants of Algernon are questioned about C-9, most will never have heard of it. Better informed asteroid miners may complain that they wish they could use C-9 in their small scale mining operations, but its rarity and expense limits the use of the explosive to wealthy mining corps. Once again, searches of relevant transit and sales records around Ceres will reveal that only the Belt mining corporations use C-9 (Difficulty 15+), and that the only corporation which currently stockpiles and uses C-9 is CAM (Difficulty 25+). Hmmmm...

The Tattooed Man: Any inquiries as to the existence and identity of the mysterious tattooed man who was reported to have been sucked into the void will lead to a total blank. It seems that the UN authorities may have been right in disregarding this sighting. Perhaps...

The Mining Companies: If inquiries are made around Algernon, it will become apparent to the players that the big three Belt mining companies all have a motive to disrupt the "Free The Slaves" campaign. As the PCs will probably have already discovered, the proposed "Free The Slaves" media campaign was harsh, shocking, and disturbingly credible - a public relations disaster for all the Belt mining companies. Noteworthy, however, is the past reputation and behaviour of each of the three companies. The Director of Solar Mines, Nigel

Hawkes, is known to have instigated a rather "soft" policy on the prisoners in his mines, and the company has markedly improved its human rights record recently. Belt Mines Inc. have a reasonable reputation amongst the Belters, as they actually pay their inmates on prison mines and prisoner casualties, whilst common, are not viewed as excessive by the UN. Conversely, Consolidated Asteroid Mining stands out amongst the pack as both the most profitable and feared mining company in the Belt. CAM prisoners have the shortest lifespan of all inmates in the prison mines, constantly ignore or hinder UN investigations, and are undoubtedly responsible for many human rights abuses. What is more, the corporation was particularly targeted in the "Free The Slaves" media campaign, whose accusation that CAM run some of their mines with slaves provided by Rovers is backed up by local rumours!

A powerful and ruthless company with much to lose at the hands of "Free The Slaves", CAM could well be behind the bombing. Further evidence such as the limited use of C-9 in the Belt and the serial number on the destroyed cyberform would seem to support this theory. This is, however, simply not enough solid evidence for the UN and Interpol to condemn CAM without further inquiries, as Dukovi will point out. When the PCs feel that they have substantially completed their investigations on Ceres (don't let this drag on for too long), then have Marshall Dukovi summon them to his office in Algernon. Given that CAM is now a prime suspect, Dukovi orders (yes, orders!) the player characters to travel out to CAM's main Belt prison mine, Andrei. He will provide the AI team with any vital equipment (referee's discretion), a small unarmed Deep Space OTV, and a letter giving the PCs UN authority to search CAM's Andrei Base. Dukovi will add that CAM have a reputation of hindering and ignoring the UN in the past, so they should not place too much weight upon his letter. With a warning that he will be keeping his eye on them, and that they are to regularly report to Algernon, Dukovi bids the player characters farewell.

ANDREI BASE

The journey from Ceres to Andrei base should take several days, depending upon the whims of the player characters and how much trouble they can get themselves into. Trouble? You bet! Once again, it's time for you, Mr Referee, to use your imagination and the previously published SolSpace material that details the Asteroid Belt (see issue 27).

Upon arrival, gaining access and useful information from Andrei Base is fraught with difficulties for the players. CAM do not appreciate visitors to their prison mine, especially when such visitors come under the guise of a UN investigative team. The letter of authorisation to search Andrei that they have is unlikely to get them too far. At best, the Marshall's authorisation will allow the PCs to enter Andrei and interview Jonas Velat.

JONAS VELAT

The administrator of CAM's largest Belt mine, Jonas Velat, is not a likable man. In fact, the responsibility of running the large and profitable Andrei Base, with 5000 prisoners, 50 guards and 50 technicians, has transformed Velat into a tyrannical monster! If the PCs are able to arrange an interview with the CAM administrator, on the weight of Dukovi's authorisation, they will be

permitted to dock at Andrei and will be escorted by armed guards to Velat's luxurious office. Filled with antique furniture, wooden panelling, Persian rugs, expensive artworks, and a reinforced window which gives a clear view of the surrounding Belt, Velat's office reeks of wealth and power.

Initially, Velat will allow the player characters to ask a few questions, all of which will receive non-committal answers or direct denials. As far as Velat is concerned, he has heard nothing, seen nothing and thought nothing about the bombing. He even states that he did not know the bombing had occurred! Any characters with psychology, interrogation or interview skill will detect quite easily (Difficulty 15+) that Velat appears quite smug and is not telling the whole truth. Before too many questions can be asked, however, Velat changes tack and becomes rather aggressive. The administrator will demand to know why his time is being wasted, why he and CAM are being harassed, and how long "pathetic little snot-dribbling punks like you" have been Marshall Dukovi's lapdogs! Velat will rudely demand that the player characters leave, and guards will enter to escort them (perhaps forcibly) back to the docks.

During the return trip to the docks, the PCs will hear from behind them: "Help me! I'm from the Royal Navy! I've been..." THUD! If they turn around, the team will see a man in prison uniform being dragged through a door by two guards, who are beating the prisoner with stun rods. The player's own guards will prevent any pursuit, and laugh off the situation: "These convicts will try anything to escape! Pathetic! Ha, ha, ha!". The PCs will not see the unfortunate prisoner again.

By now, the aggressive behaviour of Jonas Velat and the strange plea from the desperate prisoner should have aroused the player character's suspicions even further. No doubt, they will not be too keen to leave Andrei before they have made some further investigations. The team will be permitted to remain on their OTV at the docks for 24 hours, in which time they may refuel, repair any damage, and rest. After this time has elapsed, the CAM personnel will bluntly tell the AI team to leave Andrei. A guided tour of the asteroid is totally out of the question. Therefore, it will be up to the players, perhaps with a few suggestions from Ricky, to find a way of investigating the base for any further clues related to the bombing. In addition, Ricky will point out that this would be a perfect opportunity to gain further evidence as to prisoner conditions on Andrei, which could be used by AI against CAM. As always, there are an almost infinite variety of ways which the player characters may devise to gain access to Andrei Base, and the referee must determine whether or not these are feasible on a case-by-case basis. Use the supplied map and these descriptions of the main areas of Andrei Base to run this section of the adventure:

North Dock: The dock on the North pole of Andrei Base is where the PCs' OTV is docked. Various gantries, spaceship maintenance facilities, and fuel tanks are present in this area, along with armoured airlocks that permit access to the base itself. No vessels other than the AI team's OTV will be docked in this area. The North Dock is watched over by 5 weary guards, who have orders not to allow the player characters to leave the area.

Administration: As well as housing the luxurious office and living quarters of the base administrator, this area is the workplace of 5 technical personnel who monitor prison records, shipping, production and supplies. Several computer

and crews are sold as slaves to other mining operations.

Corporations: Among the three corps who run Prison Mines, the largest and most feared is Consolidated Asteroid Mining. The CAM mines are the most productive, but inmates have a substantially shorter lifespan. Repeated calls for UN investigation have gone unanswered. The few reviews of CAM facilities have been superficial and contrived.

Belt Mines Inc. are the second largest, and they operate both regular mines and prison mines. The conditions are similar in both set-ups, but in one the workers do get paid (not very well considering the hazards and poor living conditions). Belt Mines advocate the Trustee system, and are well known for allowing their armed Trustees to "enforce discipline" amongst the inmates.

The third prominent corp is Inner Solar Mines and Refineries (referred to as Solar Mines). This corp runs both prison mines and large refineries in both the Belt and on Mars itself. They have been accused of regularly breaching UN regulations in the past, but a recent change of directors has seen a marked improvement. Given a choice, most prisoners would prefer to work out their sentence with this corp.

Mines: Amongst the Belt, there is upwards of 50 large prison mines. These have between 500 and 1000 prisoners. The largest of all is Andrei Base, a facility of 5000 prisoners and 50 guards and techs. It is run by CAM and has maintained record profits since it's second year of operations.

Working in the Mines: Life in a prison mine is dirty, dangerous and often lethal. In general, only the barracks and refinery areas are pressurised. Work in the mines themselves is done in pressure suits. These suits are cheaply made, with poor quality seals and minimal radiation shielding. They carry about 4 hours supply. The only saving grace is that they are reasonably resistant to tearing or punctures. Even so, many prisoners lose their lives to suit blowouts, as a laser drill or even a good blow from a pick will stuff the suits integrity really quick.

The shafts and tunnels are dimly lit, with helmet lights providing most of the illumination. Experienced workers can find their way around their own work tunnel by touch, conserving the precious suit batteries to run heating.

Mining itself is done by robot drills, which bore their way into an asteroid's side with lasers and power hammers. Some of the better skilled prisoners run these, often as trustees. The bulk of the prisoners then follow behind them, working the sides of the tunnels for poorer strains of metals and ores.

Non Player Characters

Ricky "The Ferret" Cavanaugh: As one of AI's most competent field operatives, Ricky gained the nickname "The Ferret" due to his consistent ferreting out of the truth in human rights investigations. An amiable but deadly fellow, Ricky is a competent marksman, brawler and knife-fighter, in addition to his skills as an investigator, interrogator and space pilot.

Andreas Dukovi: One of the UN Marshalls assigned to the Belt, Andreas Dukovi is a tired, cynical and rather bitter man whose greying beard, lined face and bloodshot eyes allude to the stressful and difficult job he has to contend with. Dukovi is suspicious of everyone, believing this to be a wise policy in the lawless Belt, although the player characters may gain his trust, knowledge and considerable influence through hard and honest work. The Marshall is not the combative type, preferring to leave physical conflicts to the RUK Space Marines.

Jonas Velat: The administrator of CAM's huge Andrei Base mining operation, the player characters will find this man to be a tyrannical and uncooperative monster. Velat is tough talking and aggressive, believing that in the anarchistic Belt those who have the most force and money, such as CAM, should also wield the most power. The administrator is blatantly disrespectful towards the UN's authority, and was certainly arrogant and ruthless enough to have masterminded the bombing of the "Free The Slaves" office, in cooperation with The Claws.

Lukreta: This former Rover is a pirate with revenge on her mind. As her elaborate tattoos demonstrate, Lukor was one a member of The Claws, but was betrayed by competing clan members and convicted of piracy. Cunning, aggressive and self-centered, Lukor will nevertheless be grateful if the characters save her life in the mines of Andrei, and doubly so if they can manage to remove the explosive collar that all prisoners must wear around their necks! Lukor hopes that her "reward" of leading the player characters to The Claws base will also result in some form of revenge against her former comrades.

Vorax: The mysterious and awe-inspiring tattooed man, this Gemini Cyborg is a combat monster! Wielding a huge United Armaments CLAW and an exponent of the Full 'Borg martial art Panzerfaust (see Solo of Fortune 2, pp.66-71), Vorax combines these weapons with an extra-reinforced body, boosted strength and reflexes, cyber-senses, and the ability to survive and function in a vacuum. Vorax originates from Mercury, but has been stationed in the Belt for several years as an advisor to the allied Rover clan, The Claws. Why are the Cyborgs so interested in the affairs of the Belt? Only time will tell...

terminals are present, with access to the base datafortress(!). Two guards patrol here at all times.

Guards Quarters: This section of the base comprises personal sleeping areas, a cafeteria, gymnasium, and a holo-vid recreation centre for the 50 Andrei Base guards when they are off duty.

Technicians Quarters: Smaller but otherwise identical to the Guards Quarters, and houses the 50 base technical personnel when they are off duty.

Armoury and Security Centre: A heavily armoured and protected zone, the armoury and security centre is the nexus of control over Andrei Base's prisoners, computers, armament and power generators. This area is completely surrounded by a Security Zone, is guarded by 5 heavily armed, armoured and cybered troopers, and houses 5 technical security personnel. The armoury may only be accessed through two armoured airlocks, and contains weapons ranging from small knives, tasers and stun rods to a variety of heavy weapons, along with a large stockpile of explosives. What type of explosive? Why, C-9 of course! In addition, 4 spare remote control explosive collar detonators are stored in the armoury (see Prisons in Space).

The base mainframe computer is housed here, along with several access terminals, and the datafortress is constantly watched over by rotating shifts of Pro-level system operators. The exact layout and capabilities of the Andrei datafortress are up to the referee's discretion, but any attempt to attack the system should be a formidable task! In addition, the Andrei mainframe is very rarely open to intrusion, and will probably have to be accessed physically within the base if a netrunner wishes to wreak havoc upon the system! If one of the players manages to get past the lethal intrusion counter-measures and Pro-level systems operator, they may find the following piece of bizarre information:

MEMO: Administrator Velat to All Security Staff.
SUBJECT: South Dock - Restriction Code Black.
SECURITY PRIORITY: Black.

TEXT: All personnel are to henceforth be banned from entering the South Dock area for 48 hours, especially whilst our UN visitors are present on the base. The UN visitors are to be kept tightly restricted to the North Dock. Other visitors are due at the South Dock within 24 hours. All personnel are to avoid the South Dock, which is to be kept open for docking at all times. Navigation and shipping technicians are to be advised not to be concerned with the sudden appearance of a visiting vessel at the South Dock, even if it does not appear on their monitors and scanners.
END MEMO.

If the player characters unearth this strange memo, they would probably be wondering what it all means. Good! Whatever the case, the AI team will probably want to investigate the South Dock.

Mechanical Depot and Workshop: The depot and workshop is usually unguarded, and consists of three large storage areas that are filled with mining drills, small vehicles, spare parts, tools, electronic equipment, working benches and similar technical apparatus. Technicians are always in this area, preoccupied with whatever job they are currently performing. If the depot and workshop is searched, the player characters may come across a storage container labelled: "MINEX UNITS". Inside, there are nine of the 50cm cube wheeled cyberforms, with space for a tenth. Where is the tenth MINEX cyberform? Perhaps scattered in a thousand pieces around the Algneron Strip by 20 kilograms of C-9?

Infirmiry: The high security infirmiry is divided into two sections - one for staff and one for prisoners, and has a staff of two doctors. The excellent medical facilities available here seem to keep the base personnel fit and healthy, yet very few prisoners ever get to see it! In fact, whilst there is one guard present in the infirmiry (recovering from prisoner-induced concussion), there are no sick prisoners. It seems that most prisoners are left to die in the mines or cells, rather than receiving expensive medical treatment.

Solar and Nuclear Generators: Andrei Base is powered largely by a vast array of solar panels. As a backup power source which is often needed to power mining equipment, a nuclear generator has also been installed in the radiation-shielded core of the asteroid.

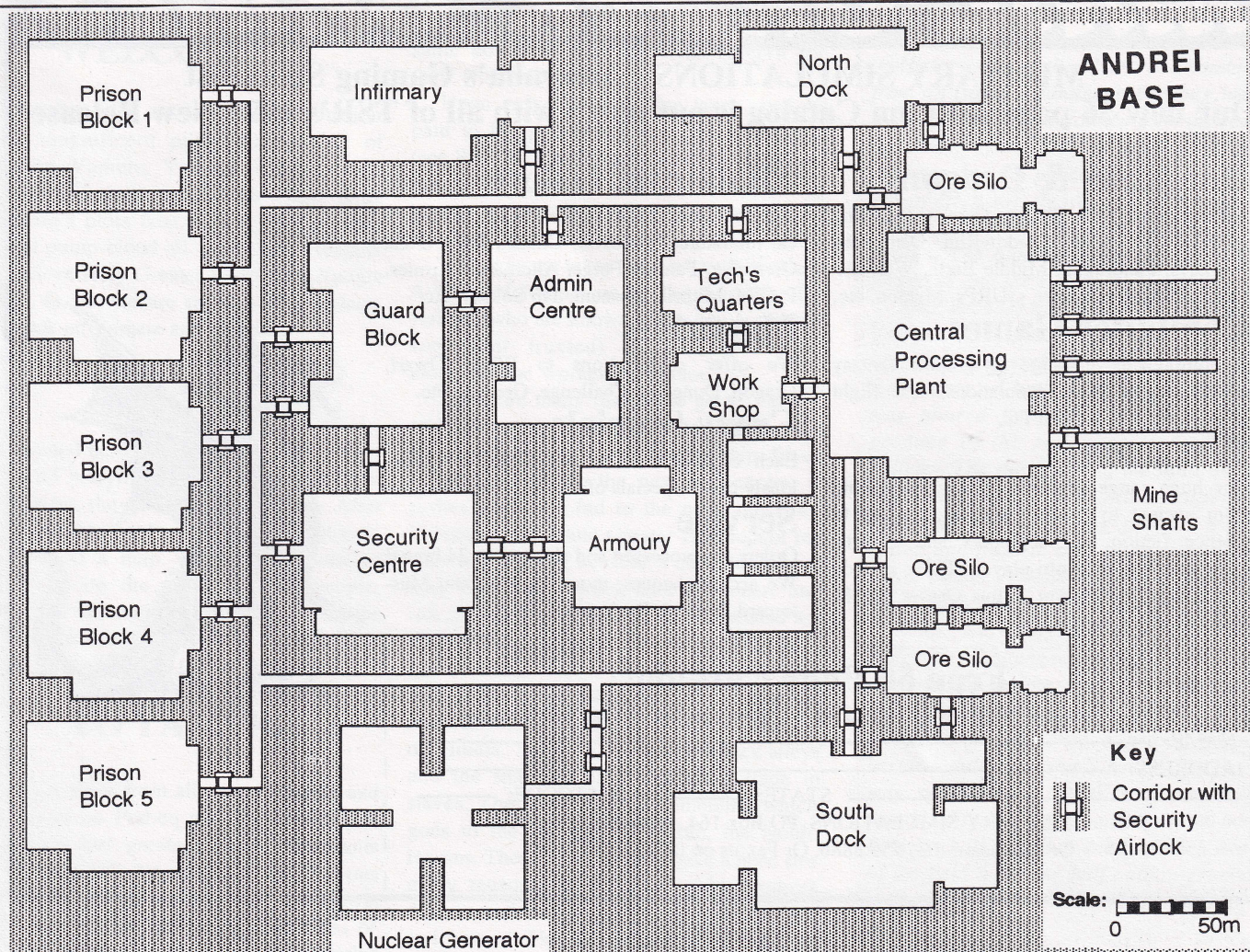
Security Zone: Several areas of Andrei Base are surrounded by Security Zones. Each zone is a ten meter diameter tunnel carved through the asteroid and laced with a variety of traps and defences. Systems include automated weapons, motion-sensitive mines, explosive collar perimeter markers, combat cyberforms, gas vents, mono-wires, stun grenades, electrified flooring and razor-wire. Constantly monitored and patrolled, such areas are sometimes left scattered with the bones of previous escapees to add an extra factor of horror to the Security Zones. To date, no one has ever escaped Andrei Base.

Prisoners Quarters: The 5000 prisoners on the asteroid are divided into 5 separate living areas. Within each living area are 10 cells, each housing 100 prisoners in cramped, dark and unsanitary conditions. Dead bodies are left to rot in these cells, as casualties amongst prisoners due to infighting, rebellion, sickness and accidents are common. The guards largely avoid these areas, leaving discipline and monitoring up to automated cameras, guns and the feared explosive collars. There are no recreation areas, prisoners rarely wash, and the "food" served is a horrific combination of recycled algae and contraceptive chemicals.

Central Processing Plant and Storage Silos: The most important area of Andrei Base for CAM, the Central Processing Plant takes the raw material mined by prisoners from the asteroids, and processes it into a reasonably pure form of ore. The processed ore is placed into storage silos until it is ready for shipping out of the Belt. Around 20 techs oversee the careful running of the plant and the mining equipment, whilst 10 armed guards patrol the area, as it is a popular avenue of attempted escape by prisoners who jump on the conveyor belt from the mine shafts to the Processing Plant.

Mine Shafts: Dark, filthy, unpressurised and extremely dangerous, the mine shafts of Andrei are the frequent site of prisoner casualties. Once again, the guards avoid this prisoner-filled area, preferring to maintain discipline by indirect means.

Sometime during their explorations, the player characters come across the prone form of Lukreta, an imprisoned Rover who is a member of The Claws. Lukreta has similar tattoos to those on the unidentified 37th victim of the Algneron bombing, and is in desperate need of help. The Rover's spacesuit is leaking, and one of her legs was broken by a rival prisoner, who happened to be an old adversary from The Claws. Rather than kill her outright, Lukreta's rival left his victim unable to move and sure to die from depressurisation! If the PCs show mercy to Lukreta and rescue her, the Rover will promise to reward the AI team with information that the UN and RUK would pay



millions of eurobucks for. All the characters have to do is help Lukreta escape from Andrei Base, then she will lead them to their reward somewhere in the Belt. What is the reward? The PCs will have to wait and see, but Lukreta seems to be genuine.

Actually getting Lukreta off Andrei alive will prove to be a significant challenge. Apart from avoiding the numerous guards, security systems and dangerous prisoners, the explosive collar around Lukreta's neck will have to be removed before she leaves the asteroid. Defusing the explosive in the collar is a Very Difficult Demolitions task (25+), whilst actually unlocking and deactivating the security collar is a Nearly Impossible Electronic Security task (30+). Any failed attempt to tamper with the collar will alert security personnel, whilst a Fumble (roll of 1) will lead to automatic detonation! Ouch! Alternatively, a skilled Netrunner could infiltrate the Andrei Base datafortress and attempt to discover the heavily encrypted access code for Lukreta's collar - a truly formidable task.

South Dock: If the PCs manage to reach the South Dock, they will find that the airlock leading to this area is blocked by 5 alert guards. If the guards are eliminated, distracted or otherwise bypassed, and if the PCs can get through the locked and armoured airlock, they will find the layout of the South Dock to be identical to that of the North. What is in the dock, however, is far more surprising. Some sort of armed deep space OTV is preparing to leave the dock, and the markings on the vessel are undoubtedly those of The Claws! What are the Rovers doing in the dock of CAM's largest Prison Mine? There are ten Rovers scurrying about, all armed to the teeth, hastily

packing boxes onto the OTV, completing last minute preparations, and dragging a large number of chains and manacles on board. Observant PCs will notice that the chains and manacles seem to be human-sized, and some are glistening with fresh blood! Perhaps the rumours about CAM buying slaves from the Rovers are true?

If the PCs continue to observe the Rovers unnoticed, rather than rushing into combat, they will gain further insights. Characters with military or extensive deep space experience may notice that atop the Rover's OTV is a large spherical object, which may well be some sort of electronic countermeasures device (ECM). Judging by the size of the ECM device, it is probably extremely effective. Where in the universe did The Claws get their paws on complex ECM technology? Hmmmm...

In addition, a massively muscled and tall man will soon stride out of the OTV, carrying with him some sort of massive automatic shotgun! What will most catch the PC's eyes, however, is the number of bright tattoos which cover his face. Could this be the mysterious tattooed man? The huge man is actually Vorax, a Full-Conversion Gemini Cyborg, although the PC will probably not be able to detect this. Using his wide range of cyber-senses, Vorax may be able to detect the PCs if they are watching from a concealed position (test to see if this is so). If the AI team are detected, Vorax will let out a mighty roar, bring up his huge shotgun, and start blasting indiscriminately in the direction that he suspects the PCs are lurking in! The remaining Rovers will retreat to the OTV, provide Vorax with covering fire, and take off from the docks within a minute. Vorax will either accompany The Claws if

he can, or simply leap into the vacuum and catch up with the Rovers later. Whatever the case, Vorax will survive this encounter to fight another day.

If Vorax does not detect the PCs, then the initiative falls to them as to what action should be taken. The tactics of Vorax and the Rovers, if combat should arise, will be to secure their escape. Alternatively, the AI team could attempt to sabotage the OTV, blow it up, or stow away on the vessel. Their chances of success will depend on their skills, luck, and preferences of the referee. Essentially, however, Vorax and the Rovers should escape from the players in this encounter, unless a truly brilliant plan is devised, which is then carried out perfectly!

But don't let your players worry - they'll be seeing their new "friends" soon enough!

NEXT ISSUE...

We conclude this exciting scenario, with a fateful confrontation with a derelict spaceship, vengeful Rovers, lunatic cyborgs and a pack of trigger-happy player characters. This one's got the lot!

We'll also be providing some further background information on the Rover Clans, those vikings of the space-lanes. Are they really bloodthirsty killers, or the new pioneers of the solar system? Only we know for sure...and we aren't telling!

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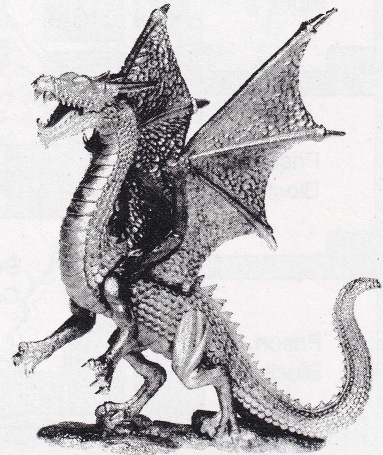
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Australian Archetypes

The Competition

In issue 25, **Australian Realms** and our good friends at **R. Talsorian Games** invited our readers to submit character archetypes for the *Castle Falkenstein* roleplaying game inspired by an Australian type of the 1870s. The three competition winners as adjudged by R. Talsorian Games will be printed in the official *Castle Falkenstein* supplement covering Australia plus they will receive a copy of the *Book Of Sigils*, a *Castle Falkenstein* Beer Stein, and the Grand Prize Winner also receives a custom engraved CFCalling Card Case. At this point I hand over the stylus to the Chief Judge, R. Talsorian's Mark Schumman.

THE JUDGING

Mark Schumman, *Castle Falkenstein* line editor here. Well it was tough, but we have the winners. In order to give the entries a fair review, we felt we had to get ourselves into the proper mood to appreciate all things Australian. First, I called Derek Quintanar and Chris Williams (both *Castle Falkenstein* writers in addition to being RTG employees) over to my place. We then drank a case of Foster's (Australian for Bee-ah - at least it's about the only Australian beer we get over here) each while eating Vegemite Sandwiches and watching *The Light Horsemen*. Now in the proper state of mind we set to work.

As I said, it was tough. All the entries were great, and they all deserve to be published in an Australia sourcebook for *Castle Falkenstein*. But here are the two winners and the Grand Prize winner. The final decision was mine, but we made our choices not only based on how cool the Dramatic Personae were, but also how Australian they were and how suited to the setting they were. These guidelines were not strictly enforced, but they are what we tried to go by. Thus, Dramatic Personae such as the Jackeroo and Bush Ranger, while cool and Australian, have equivalent archetypes in *Castle Falkenstein* or *Six-guns & Sorcery*.

We considered sending a "Runners-Up" list, but realised that it would be comprised by just about every

other entry in the contest. So, we'll just settle on a "Favourite Runner-Up". The Runner-Up doesn't win anything, but maybe we can get it printed anyway just because it's so near. Without further delay, here we go:

Favourite Runner Up: Aethernaut, by Garry Fay. The fearless men of the Woomera Aether Research Facility, bravely risking life and limb to spread the right and decent cause of British Imperialism into space! What a topic for a 'Boy's Own Adventure' story!

Second Winner: Remittance Man, by Patrick Williamson. While this entry was not the most Australian of the bunch, it captured the manners and society of the time perfectly. The idea of a down-and-out young nobleman, exiled to Australia because of an excess of gambling and wenching was just so *Flashman* that it had to be one of the winners.

First Winner: Kadaicha, by Garry Fay. Not only is this an aboriginal character, not only is it uniquely Australian, but by giving this character the Etherealness ability, Garry hit very close to what we decided Aboriginal magic was like in *Castle Falkenstein*. When we read what Garry wanted engraved on his card case, we almost gave it to him (it was so spirited and moving, it brought tears to our eyes), but then we ran across...

The Grand Prize Winner: Bunyip Hunter, by Jonathan A. Spear. Boy, this guy has bunyips on the brain, and by the time we finished reading his entries, we did too! We just loved

the thought of paranoid delusional yahoos wandering the Outback armed only with a hunting rifle and a copy of *De Bunyipus Horribilus*. How wonderfully demented. Just one question Jonathan - how many copies of *Terror Australis* do you own?

So there we go. Congratulations to the winners. You did outstanding work. I'd also like to thank everyone who participated in the contest. Your entries were all great, and it was really hard to pick just three. So I'll just say that I think *all* the entries should be printed in a *Castle Falkenstein* Australia sourcebook. Now, just what the hell is a Bunyip, and what do I defend myself from it with? Iron or an Elder Sign?



The Grand Prize Winner

BUNYIP HUNTER

By Jonathan A. Spear

Some say that you have lost your marbles as a result of living in this isolated Bush for too long, but you know the Truth! They are out there, lurking, watching you with supernatural eyes - the Bunyips! Perhaps these malicious Nature Spirits have cruelly slain your friends and family, leaving you as the sole lucky survivor. Such hideous beasts must be stopped! Whilst ignorant farmers dismiss your sightings, blaming their stock losses upon the hungry tribes, you know the real cause of such sheep and cattle mutilations. When a Swagman disappears in the Bush, never to be seen again, you know the true fate of the poor wretch. Armed with your trusty rifle, intimate knowledge of the beastly Bunyip, and a craving for revenge, the supernatural horrors of the Bush will not prey upon humanity of you have any say in the matter!

Strong Suits: Courage, Marksmanship, Stealth.

Possessions: Bunyip hunting rifle, revolver, sharp knife, backpack with tent, reliable horse, bells, holy symbol, rations and water bottle, copy of *De Bunyipus Horribilus*.

In Your Diary: Notes on reported Bunyip sightings, Bush maps, sketches of the horrible beasts you have slain, hunting tips, paranoid delusional ramblings "They're watching me again, I can feel it..."

Why You're Here: You'll get these evil fiends, if it's the last thing you do! The fire of revenge burns deep within your soul, and the very thought of Bunyips and the other Faerie makes you delirious with rage! Now is the chance to stalk the beasts, learn their habits and weaknesses, then avenge your loved ones. Justice, righteousness, and your new-found adventuring friends are on your side!

NB: The suggested powers of the Bunyip are those of the Nature Spirit (see *Castle Falkenstein* pp. 174-175).

The First Winner

KADAICHA

By Garry Fay

In New Europa they name themselves wizards, here they are called Kadaicha. The Kadaicha Man's first loyalty is to his people, both their spiritual needs and their sorcerous protection. In the past there was only one Kadaicha per tribe. Those young ones who showed themselves to have potential in "the power" forced to either apprentice themselves to the current Kadaicha and wait until their time came or choose another way of life. With the coming of the British, however, this custom soon changed. Power was needed to stem the power of the foreigners lest they change the native people's traditional way of life. Every man or woman blessed with the power was trained. This resulted in an abundance of Kadaicha once the peace accord was signed. As with all those who are blessed with an understanding of the arts arcane, the Kadaicha were keen to increase their



knowledge. To this end, those who were not needed as their tribe's spiritual guides were free to travel where they will, to learn from and teach their fellow practitioners of the sorcerous arts from foreign shores and to add their strength to the battle against those who tread along the Dark Paths.

Strong Suits: Sorcery, Stealth, Etherealness (*)

(*) Though this power is usually available to Faerie characters only, it seemed to fit in with the Kadaicha character, it is restricted up to and including Great Ability level only, however.

Possessions: Bag of natural totems through which your spells are focused, arcane paints which you use to adorn your body and enhance your spells, bone wand.

In Your Diary: Symbols and notes of arcane lore. Translations of your spells in New Europa equivalents and vice-versa. Notes on magical places and folk you have met.

Why You're Here: The paths of ley which carry magick throughout the world interweave from one nation to another, yet the rituals of magic differ from your people and the practitioners of New Europa. Perhaps you have set your mind to unlocking this dilemma. Or rather, you have seen visions of great things about to take place and have arranged for yourself to be present at their birth so that you can follow them and shape their outcome. Whatever your reasons for being here, they are not that much different than those of your New European counterparts.

The Second Winner

REMITTANCE MAN

By Patrick Williamson

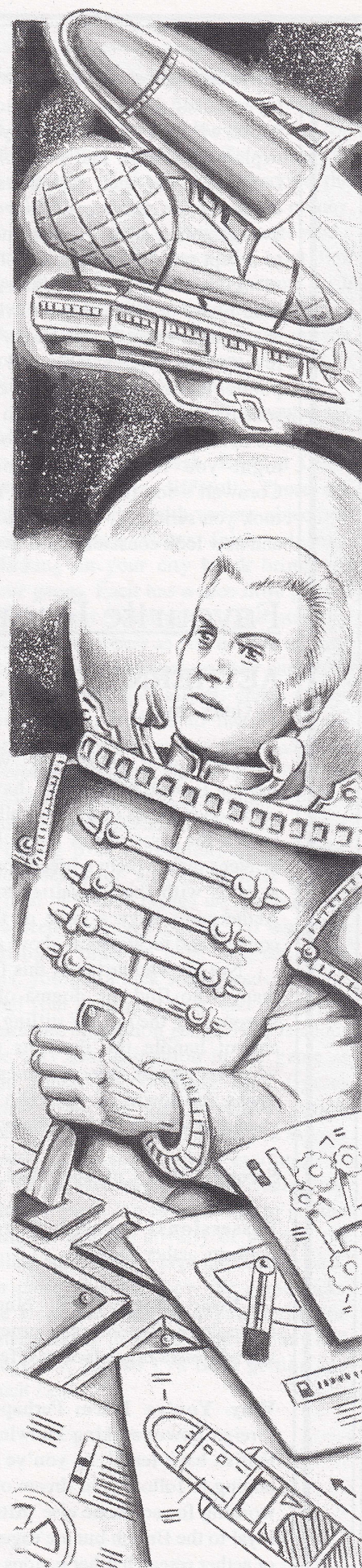
Disgraced, your crime the near defamation of your family, adultery, gambling, duels and disrespect for the strict Victorian social order, you are guilty of all, yet feel remorse for none. However, your title is too powerful, you will not inherit unless all other claimants die off, but until then you have been bought off by the current title holder. Paid to disappear to some remote colony, you have done so, your true name you do not mention for even here there are spies watching your behaviour or perhaps trying to track you down. You are trying not to rely upon the next payment but you have to keep moving, settling down does not suit you. Besides your gambling debts keep mounting up from place to place and people don't smile that love of the rogue smile out here. All have it hard and your type of nonsense can only go so far before someone takes you outside to settle the score.

Strong Suits: Charisma, Education, Social Graces

Possessions: Derringer, a small yet expensive wardrobe, baggage (well used), swag and cooking equipment (camping is a way of life on the road), horse.

In Your Diary: Your next payment date, the one contact that knows your true identity, notes on your next quick gain venture, and a tragically worded will to be sent upon your demise to your next of kin.

Why You're Here: In a two year spree you gambled, adulterated and disgraced yourself across much of New Europa. Then one night you were waylaid as you



lay in a half drunken stupor and brought before your father, who had finally tracked you down. Carefully he explained that he had paid off several influential families to rid their daughters of child, and some others for the maiming of their sons in drunken duels over gambling debts. He disowned you and forced you to accept payment for a trifle of your real inheritance as well as exile to Australia, America or Africa (he didn't care or wish to know which). He warned that any rumour of further disgraces in exile, or that if you revealed your true identity and your disgrace became public, that he would issue a contract for your life, something he half threatened to do anyway. Now you are in Australia (your father probably knows) and one night you revealed that you are the Duke of Cornwall's son to a Squatter. You don't know if he took you seriously, but you know your father's pride and now look constantly over your shoulder.

Favourite Runner Up

AETHERNAUT

By Garry Fay

These men, known as "WARFies" (Woomera Aether Research Facility), have been described as either courageous or mad, usually both. Their desire to unlock the mysteries of the aether and delve into the heavens makes them a breed apart, often putting them at odds with their loyalties to crown and country. Aethernauts have a code of their own, honouring courage and recklessness above all else.

Not all who arrive at this facility stay. There are many who find the dogma of British Imperialism surrounding the facility stifling. There are others who cannot handle the rigorous training regime. For whatever reason, there are renegade aethernauts in the docks and towns of Australia looking for a second chance or a buyer for their knowledge.

Strong Suits: Courage, Pilot, Physique

Possessions: Aether suit, revolver, sabre, dress uniform, aether gadgets.

In Your Diary: Details/blueprints of latest aether technology. Reports on journeys undertaken. Names and addresses of contacts to offer your services to.

Why You're Here: Perhaps you're a spy for a foreign power seeking knowledge of how much the British have learnt, or you've left Woomera and are hoping to follow your dream of reaching the stars by working for someone else. Alternately, you could be loyal to the British but are eager to discover the stages of aether research other nations may be at.

And Because We Had Room

FREED CONVICT

by Lee Sheppard

You bear the stigma of an unjust legal system. Transported to the colonies for what many would consider a crime of necessity, perhaps stealing a loaf of bread to feed a hungry family, you spent the first few years no better off than a slave. Working your way up to an overseer position, upon the completion of your sentence you were released with a small stipend and told to make your own way. Work is hard to find, even for one who has served his/her sentence, so you spend much of your time travelling, in the hope that you may eventually find somewhere you can call home.

Strong Suits: Courage, Fisticuffs, Tinkering.

Possessions: A swag (bedroll), set of clothes, strong boots, cooking utensils, set of home-made tools, small mirror, a dog-eared Bible, a treasured cameo of your mother's image.

In Your Diary: A record of your time as a convict; how you overcame adversity, the people you met - those you liked and those you hated. A record of your travels, including a number of contacts that you have made.

Why You're Here: To try and remove the stigma of your past. To try to prove to society that you have much to offer. To try and make your fortune in the goldfields that you've heard so much about. Perhaps your companions have similar ideas, and you travel together for mutual companionship/protection.

PROSPECTOR

by Rhiannon Donaldson

Spurred on by tavern tales of gold nuggets the size of boulders, you have ventured into the bush to find your share of this wealth. Let others start digging at the first field they arrive at; you have more cunning! You spend your time travelling, listening to reports from near and far in order to determine the most profitable area. When you know that, you'll move in and make your fortune.

Strong Suits: Fisticuffs, Physique, Courage

Possessions: Knife, rope, recent newspapers, a small vial of dirt and gold dust, water bag, pick axe.

In Your Diary: Newspaper clippings, notes on gold finds, maps, names of contacts in different areas.

Why You're Here: Perhaps you're investigating a rumour of a new goldfield. You could be travelling to talk to friends at another town. Maybe one of the others has, or has information about, a nugget of gold. Or maybe you think they do...

Bonescribes (\$12.95, MirrorDanse Books) is a compilation of ten short stories which have been garnered from the best of Australian Horror in 1995. Each story has been previously published and has been selected from amongst the many horror related collections which appeared during the year. Editors Bill Congreve and Robert Hood have plenty of experience with the horror genre in Australia and have brought together a fair representation of the best of the short story field. The editors openly admit in their introduction, that the more typical supernatural monster and mainstream vampire/demon tales are not included in this collection. They have steered clear of the pulp type schlock horror that comes in the form of "Texas Chainsaw Massacre" or "Friday the Thirteenth" and neither Dracula nor Frankenstein are along for the ride.

What the reader gets, though, is a quirky collection of the strange and bizarre. Orgasm by virtual reality memory, mutant sentient viruses and the hazards of door to door salespersons are all staple fare in this feast of Australian Short Story writing. *Bonescribes* proves that good horror does not have to be measured by the volume of blood and gore spilled on the page. From the limitless possibilities of Stephen Dedman's "The Lady of Situations" (I still don't know if I would like to be able to do that or not?), to the rather short concluding story of "The Corpse" by Bill Congreve, the book is a highly enjoyable read. Designed to stimulate your thoughts and challenge your view of what is normal in this world, it is a publication not to be overlooked. If you haven't yet discovered that Australian writers are equal to anything that is available from overseas, you should make this your first stop and be prepared to be pleasantly - or is that supposed to be horribly - surprised.

Dinotopia Lost by Alan Dean Foster (Bantam Hardback, \$29.95). Set on the mythic island of Dinotopia, this is the first actual novel using James Gurney's places and inhabitants. Like the art storybooks, the major characters are a mixture of humans and sentient dinosaurs. Most people will be familiar with the Dinotopia books, and this novel will probably sell well on that basis. Unfortunately, it won't sell very well on the basis of the writing contained therein. Alan Dean Foster has given an insipid treatment of the setting and his plot is

BOOK REVIEWS

by Graham Holman
& Paul Mitting

basic in the extreme.

It is the time when the six year weather cycle of Dinotopia culminates in the mother of all storms. The Northern Plains, which bear the brunt of the storm, are evacuated well before they hit. However, a small family of bipedal dinosaurs are camping in the area. At the same time, a pirate ship has been driven ahead of the storm front to Dinotopia and due to a freak wave is carried safely over the reefs which protect the shoreline. The pirates quickly decide to explore the land for loot, and manage to capture the dinosaur family.

Their aim is to return the creatures to civilisation in return for a huge profit. Of course, the story from here develops into a chase and rescue scenario, with the impending storm's finale hanging in the background to try and add tension. The whole affair was an interesting but uninspiring read.

Foster has not really captured the sense of wonder and terror that such a land can hold. His major characters are two-dimensional, and his supporting cast are ciphers. There is a touch of humour in the book, but the action and adventure is far too mild. The ultra-political correctness of the Dinotopians is rather tiresome as well. I know that the place is a Utopia, but it really grated on me.

If the book contained Gurney's magnificent artwork, it would be a worthwhile purchase. However, you only get a tiny cover rendering of a temple. All in all, a less than satisfying product.

In **Darksaber** (Transworld) by Kevin J Anderson we have another classic in the ongoing saga of the tales of the resurgent Star Wars New Republic. Years on from the film trilogy, Han and Leia are now playing happy families, Luke is searching the Universe for potential Jedi graduates

and the remnants of the evil Empire are plotting their revenge. Admiral Daala has risen from the ashes to wreak havoc amongst the fledgling New Republic, and with friends and relations of Jabba the Hut scheming to take control of the universe, there is no shortage of action.

Star Wars has always provided a strange mix of drama and comedy. *Darksaber* is definitely no exception. Between the dark moody emotions of Jedi Master Luke Skywalker and the slapstick comedy subplots of "oh no not another Deathstar!", this story is a strange mix of styles. (Maybe it's meant to be representative of the eternal struggle between the Good and the Dark side of the Force? Somehow I don't think these novels get quite that deep). Nevertheless, you can enjoy these novels for what they are; good clean entertainment. If you loved the films, and I did, then you will love getting the lowdown on how everyone ended up. All the original characters are there, even though Luke doesn't really ever get back in touch with Obi-Wan Kenobi, and there are plenty of character and event flashbacks to let you know how Grand Moff Tarkin fared before Peter Cushing played out his death scene in the original Star Wars movie. *Darksaber* has all the vital elements of your essential Star Wars novel, and shouldn't be missed.

War of the Worlds by Mark Slouka (Abacus, \$19.95) is a thought-provoking read warning us of the dangers of the global fascination with the Internet and virtual reality. In a world where seeing is believing, what will become of our relationship to the real world as virtual reality becomes ever more pervasive, convincing and attractive? And while the "have-modems" surf into the future, what will become of the PONA's (Persons of No Account)? Slouka argues that in the real world, systems of ethics and morality have evolved naturally to protect the rights of people against physical harm. But what are the moral imperatives in the virtual world, where virtual rapes and murders have already been committed? Slouka tends to sound like a wowser at times, but I do agree with him that these and the other questions he raises require deep thought. Plug in to this one.

A great cyberpunk book that we'll have reviewed next ish is **Metal Fatigue** (Harper Collins, \$12.95) by Aussie Sean Williams. Look for it. ■

LEGEND, MYTH AND SUPERSTITION

10 New Uses For Old Stories

by Tonia Walden & Louise Pieper

Mythology is the basis of most fantasy roleplaying - books from game companies are littered with many references to monsters, heroes and gods from ancient legends, and myths have inspired most writers of heroic fantasy. Characteristics of many of the fantasy races in games such as Advanced Dungeons and Dragons, GURPs, Earthdawn and Warhammer FRP are based on mythological races such as the classic "fantasy elf" that is the close kindred of the Celtic Tuatha De Danann - the fair people.

Early rulebooks tended to lump all the pantheons and monsters together, to give the referee a wider range to choose from; a mouth-watering smorgasbord that lacked a unifying theme. Things have moved on from those crazy days of the "kitchen-sink"-style campaign ("Sure I can have a nation of marauding were-barbarians next to the city state tranquil pacifists!"). Sourcebooks for most gaming worlds now present more detailed and consistent information on races and creatures of the world, their society and magic. There are excellent cultural background sourcebooks for many fantasy systems (GURPS and Ars Magica both detail excellent medieval worlds), but for the referee who wants to personalise their campaign more, there is a wealth of ideas to be gained from some of the old myths.

1. A Complete New Background

You could set your campaign in a world based on a complete mythology. This idea is the one that will probably take the most work but can be very worthwhile by giving you a unique campaign world with a consistent background that will be readily available in books on the mythology of your choice. Even the more popular myths such as those of the Celts have a lot more to them than is common knowledge once you start reading the source texts. Jot down important names for use as non-player characters, facts about society, etc.. Then think of a way to transpose your players into the setting. By adopting a mythological theme for your campaign it can appear more internally consistent and credible, and the myths will give known direction and objectives for you and your players to follow leading to all sorts of interesting plot angles.

If your characters like to travel a lot you could have them visit far off lands. Cultures vary greatly across continents and there is no reason that it shouldn't be the same on your

campaign world if you are prepared to borrow from several different myths. This will help you create conflicts as belief systems of people over the continents will certainly clash. The more obscure African, Indian, American, and Australasian myths make for interesting alternatives to the classical medieval European settings. Many of these regions were unknown to the Western World except through wildly exaggerated stories, so any contact would be as if with a totally alien culture. Thus you can play up the sense of wonder and discovery as your players explore these unknown areas.

Before sitting down to design your campaign world talk to your players. They might suggest a background that they would enjoy gaming in - it could be fun if they helped with some of the research as well. One referee we know who decided to have the party go to South America got everyone so enthused that his players started bringing him books they had found on Aztecs and Mayans to read.

2. Revisionist Mythology

This is the displacement of myth elements into a completely different setting. Although this is what most fantasy games are about anyway it could be fun to displace them in a particularly offbeat way. A series by Eddie Campbell, "Deadface", describes Bacchus the Greek God of Wine living in the present day - doing pub crawls and seeing who of the old Greek gods (that nobody believes in any more) is left. It could be fun for modern games to use elements of the old myths in a similar manner.

3. New and Unusual NPCs

Any book of myths will mention at least a couple of people or supernatural beings that haven't yet appeared in any gaming book. So, unless your players are particularly well read, they won't know if you've swiped a few names, descriptions and special abilities of these obscure heroes from myth and legend. The source texts will explain at least some of the character's personality and actions so that you will have an idea how to portray the NPC in your campaign. The adventures of the mythic character will also provide some good plot seeds.

Bizarre encounters may arise from obscure myths. For example, a malevolent African spirit in mediaeval Europe could be extremely puzzling (and hard to get rid of) for the players. They may have no idea of what it is, let alone how to deal with

it. If they find out that a local adventurer has recently been to Africa (or its equivalent in your campaign) and returned with some interesting "heathen" artifacts all may start to become clear. The campaign takes on an new and exciting direction as the players try to discover how to rid themselves of the troublesome spirit. Another option is that the spirit may not be malevolent (as is often the case in African myths) and may be trying to enlist the player characters aid but is having great difficulty communicating its need to them. Sympathetic characters might even help return it to its country of origin, an adventure in itself.

4. Special Days and Festivals

Most modern festivals, such as Easter and Christmas, occur on days that coincide with pagan festivals. They were often set at such times as a compromise between the old and new religions; citizens unwilling to give up some of their pagan beliefs and festivals could be persuaded to adopt the new religion if it superimposed its holy days and celebrations on those of the old. This theme could well be used in your campaign. What is more, the original deity might not react kindly to being displaced. Or, more alarmingly, the devotions of an innocent ritual might in fact be inadvertently honouring and empowering an ancient and evil godhead.

Adapting the significance of an existing religious or cultural festival can be very effective as all sorts of things are believed to occur on this holy day. For example, on the feast day of St. George (May 6th), occult meetings are said to take place. It is also the best night for searching for a lost treasure, as the treasure is believed to glow with a bluish flame to guide favoured mortals to it. However, this search is only safe before midnight, after which time all kinds of malevolent beasts emerge. The feast day of St. Elias (August 1st) is a day on which lightning may be expected to strike, but it can be stopped from hitting a house by ringing bells or spinning a knife during the storm.

To be born at certain times had special significance too. A "chime-child" is one born between the ringing of church bells at midnight on Friday and cock's crow on Saturday. These special children can see ghosts and spirits and have powers over animals. Such a child would make a rare prize for evil adversaries to steal away.

In some regions of Europe, there are huge monolithic "standing stones" like those of Stonehenge. These have many myths attached to them which are rich sources for the roleplaying referee. Sometimes they are said to be the female guardians of cattle and crops, and elsewhere they are thought to be people who have been turned to stone for their wicked deeds. In either case the stones are said to sometimes move, usually in a cycle of years where a long period of inactivity is followed by a time of movement, say once every hundred years. Sometimes they must move to perform a specific task, such as travelling to the nearest stream and dipping their 'heads' in the water, but often their task may be more sinister - they may seek to crush livestock, crops or even people caught out on this particular night. Even the boldest adventurer in the strongest armour doesn't stand much of a chance against a rock that weighs in at over three tonnes.

5. Different Kinds of Magic

There are a number of interesting things a referee could introduce from mythology in the form of magical knowledge that the players might not have heard of before. For example, mask lore is important in some cultures, but is rarely touched on in fantasy games. Once a mask is put on the wearer summons the spirit of the mask into themselves. They then effectively represent the spirit of the mask, which is generally a helpful spirit, but this is not guaranteed.

Another strongly held and common belief is in the power of iron, especially iron that is beaten into shape while cold. Iron was thought to repel faeries and could be used to counteract the witchery. This applies not only to iron weapons but also to nails, horseshoes (hence lucky horseshoes), iron files and even weathercocks that were supposed to guard against evil spirits. In some mythologies smiths were believed to be magical because they were skilful in working with metals such as iron, and to attack a smith was a serious crime. The concept of the magic sword comes in part from old superstitions about iron and its properties.

Using these sorts of beliefs to underpin the system of magic in your game gives it more depth and plausibility. And, in magic poor games, you can give characters access to ways of defeating opponents other than the usual spells and magic weapons.



6. Legend Lore

If you find an old legend that particularly appeals to you, you could make it part of your campaign world's background. The player characters can then slowly uncover parts of the legend as the campaign unfolds, again adding depth and

consistency to your world. For example, the legend of King Arthur could be applied to a character with a mysterious past. Getting the player in question to pull a sword from a stone would be too much of a giveaway, but an equally bizarre test could lead to them discovering their destiny (not necessarily becoming king). By taking the core elements of the original legend and revising them subtly you provide a sound framework that the players will appreciate without calling you a plagiarist.

Another way of using such legends is to have the party discover an old legend. Without realising it, the characters then become caught up in the events that can only be resolved by researching the legend (a method used in the *Earthdawn* game). This also encourages your players to interact with your world as they talk to peasants and scholars investigating oral traditions and dig into libraries and monasteries for written lore.

An example of this treatment could be the legend of the Transylvanian shadow trader. The party discover in legend that in the construction of an old city people were bricked up in the walls to ensure the stability of the buildings - a barbaric practice! Recently, every time a new church, palace or important civic building is built, a few people pine away and die, a malady that is put down to a mysterious sickness. When one of the characters notice he no longer casts a shadow and is feeling ill, the time has come for action. What the characters must discover is that an enigmatic man (the shadow trader) is stealing victim's shadows by measuring the length of the shadow with a piece of cord. The cord is then walled up in the new construction, taking the victim's shadow with it. Without their shadow, the victim's pine away and die within forty days. This is thought to be less cruel than walling up a live person, although the consequences are much the same. The characters have a forty days to investigate the legend, find out who is trading in shadows and retrieve the cord from its hiding place.

7. Taboos and Superstitions

For almost everything in human experience there is a superstition (even television has its own saint). The point to remember is that accompanying many of these superstitions are taboos on ways of treating objects and creatures. In India, sacred cows are left inviolate, regardless of how hungry you are. Coleridge's poem, *The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner*, makes it quite plain that to shoot an albatross will incur bad luck.

An item doesn't have to be magical or even valuable to be of great personal worth to people. What some may take for granted might be sacred to others, and this can vary even from town to town within a province. Adventurers who travel widely will forever be trying to negotiate their way around unfamiliar customs and inadvertently trespassing on local taboos. One plot idea could be that the characters enter a town for the first time where they are welcomed and treated like royalty until one of them breaks a taboo that they were ignorant of. The party is suddenly wanted for a crime they were unaware of committing and are forced to flee an angry mob. They might be able to undo their wrong by performing some conciliatory or compensating action or service for the township. This service might seem just as obscure or unreasonable as the taboo, but it should be emphasised that it is important to the townsfolk.

Another option is to have a village beset by bad luck and the player characters as outsiders are asked to become the agents of change. They then have to uncover the cause of the bad luck.

Someone has unwittingly broken a taboo by disturbing a faerie mound, perhaps by ploughing it or building over it, and incurred the fairies' wrath. Repairing the damage to the mound may not be sufficient restoration for the vengeful faeries.

Another possibility for using taboos is for it be a condition of the player's good fortune. For example, a male character might meet, fall in love with and marry a beautiful woman, whose only condition on their lasting happiness is that he never seek to find out where she disappears to every Saturday. Most players will not be able to keep their curiosity in check and leave well enough alone. When he finally succumbs and follows her on a Saturday he sees that she is from the fairy realms and with the taboo broken she sadly bids him farewell and disappears. This storyline could be extended as the character goes in search of his loved one, facing many perils and strange adventures before being reunited.

In some regions certain trees have an aspect of divinity and actions such as cutting down an ash or oak tree are taboo. A party could be caught out by this when cutting timber for firewood. They are faced with the wrath of an outraged community or even the source of the divinity itself. This is the risk of breaking taboos - often they have a real reason for existing, especially in a fantastic world.

8. Gateways To Other Realms

Gateways to other worlds open on particular days in the year. The most common times for the working of magic and strange events are midnight, New Year's Eve, Hallowe'en, May Eve, Midsummer Night and times of an eclipse. Weird things could happen to your party at such times. A simple village festival might take on a strange twist as the characters take part and are then transported to another realm. Or the party could find themselves about on a night that they've been warned about and find that they have been going around in circles or that they have passed through a gateway. In otherworldly realms nothing that is known to the characters is certain any more. Magic may work in unexpected ways, or mortal magic may not work at all. The inhabitants of the realm will behave unpredictably and the players' intrusion might not be welcome.

The three realms that are most often mentioned in mythic literature are the spirit worlds, the faerie realms and the realms of the dead. Gateways to these places can be found, but tolls may have to be paid or tasks performed to win admission. All Hallow's Eve (Hallowe'en, Samhain, etc.) is a night on which the barriers between the worlds are at their weakest. On Hallowe'en the faerie hills are believed to open and mortals may find their way inside. If, however, adventurers foolishly enter in without proper preparation or protection they may not find their way out again for a hundred years or more. This one way to dump players from a familiar medieval setting into the modern day, or for that matter anywhere that the referee desires. Getting back should pose them quite a puzzle and it could make a humorous session with the player completely confused about their new life in elsewhere.

Walpurgisnacht (May Eve) is rumoured to be the night of the greatest meeting of witches. It is believed that on this night, if a person wishes to know the future they should venture to the village graveyard and wait their until midnight. They will then see pass through the graves a procession of the souls of all those villagers who will die in the next year.



Unless the watcher wishes to die also, they must remain still until all of the souls have passed. Player characters might learn the future fate of one of their associates or even themselves in this way, and then a series of adventures unfolds as they try to trick fate or at least avenge an untimely death.

9. Community Hysteria

Throughout history there have been times where community belief in certain legends has reached a fever pitch and spilled over into mass hysteria. This usually occurs at times of widespread misfortune such as plague, famine or war and the calamity is then blamed on supernatural forces. At such times fear makes people act in irrational ways and then lay the blame on other people, usually those who are marked in some way as being different to the 'norm' - outsiders and outcasts. The clearest example of this hysteria came about with the witch-hunts of the fifteenth century. The main victims of witchcraft hysteria were solitary old women who could not defend themselves.

If one group believes another group is causing them harm (even when the accusations are ill-founded) an interesting scenario can result. The party may be enlightened enough to realise that an injustice is being done and become dissenting voices against the mob rule. Or they may begin the adventure believing these tales of evil-wrongdoers, witches and loons only to find the accused persons are harmless and frightened victims of community hysteria. Either way, the players will be going to be challenged as they seek a diplomatic resolution to the dilemma. One alternative is that the calamity, be it plague, famine or pestilence, does indeed have a findable cause (natural or malign) and the players can avert the wrath of the community by finding it.

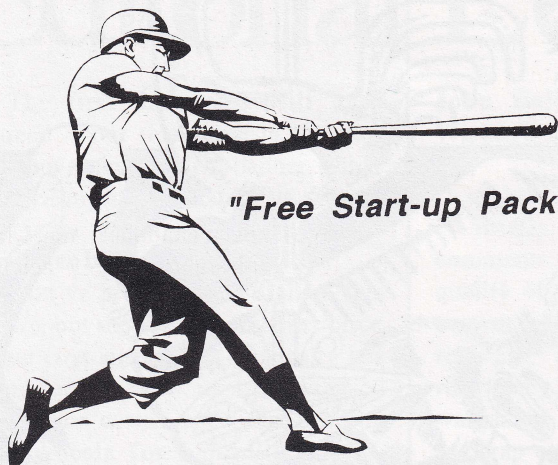
10. Folklore and Superstition

Myths are stories told to explain the world. These stories have the strange quality of being recognisably fiction yet sacred to the people to whom they have significance. Folklore, however, consists of all the knowledge passed on from one person to another which is not generally or "officially" recognised (usually coming from unauthorised or outmoded beliefs) and as such is less sacrosanct. The belief in superstition arises because people need to explain strange phenomena (such as unlikely coincidences) and they survive because people are wary of disobeying old taboos, or don't want to tempt fate, or they have an irrational fear of the unknown. The belief in folklore can be quite strong and odd tales that differ from village to village could be used to add colour to your campaign.

Strange little tales can be dropped in to add a bit of interest in conversations with NPCs. Cats acting berserk means an incoming storm and large black spiders signify that someone is about to die. These portents can be used as warning. One strange belief is that hives of domestic bees should be told the important news of people who own them or they will become upset. This may seem stupid, but a swarm of angry bees are a difficult opponent to deal with (not to mention embarrassing). Once players become used to your using folklore, superstitions and omens in your campaign you are left with the open-ended option of playing on their fears and doubts or allowing trivial events to pass without consequence. Keep them guessing.

Whichever of these ideas you decide to adopt in your own games please always remember to show respect for the people to whom these beliefs belong. Myths and legends can broaden our understanding of our world as well as add depth, colour and excitement to our fantasy roleplaying. ■

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The News Scene

Australian Realms wants to help you promote any event, product or service associated with adventure gaming or roleplaying which is being made available to our main audience, gamers in Australia. If you have such an event, product or service that you'd like our readers to know about then please contact us via:

Mail: Australian Realms, PO Box 220, Morley, Western Australia 6943.

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Club Scene

If you live in the Dandenong area and are looking for someone to wargame or roleplay with then why not check out the *Dandenong Wargamers and Roleplayers Federation* (DWARF) who meet every Sunday from 9.00am at Lyndale Secondary College. Or call club president, Frank Torcasio on (03) 9796 3402.

Also from Victoria comes the news that a video production company, **Bucket Productions**, in association with *Channel 31* and *E.R.A. Television*, are assembling a 13 part series called "Dominion" which will be a lifestyle/infotainment programme based on the roleplaying club scene in Melbourne. *Australian Realms* is also involved (with scripting) and we hope to be telling you this exciting community TV project will be appearing in other state capitals soon.

Company Scene

TSR Inc: are set to enter the storytelling fray with their new *Dragonlance: Fifth Age* adventure game due for release in September. This game will *not* be based on the *AD&D* game and will include such "revolutionary" (their word, not ours) ideas as fate cards and a flexible system for creating spells. Wow! Wish we'd thought of that. All kidding aside, however, this presents a great opportunity for our hobby to evolve in sophistication and credibility as TSR use their evergreen *Dragonlance* setting to wean the huge *AD&D* audience from dungeon-bashing and into plot-driven roleplaying.

The other item of note, other than the usual cavalcade of goodies, is the August release of the *AD&D CD-Rom Volume 1, Core Rules*. This product will put all the

text from the *Players Handbook*, *DMG*, *Monstrous Manual*, *Tome of Magic* and *Arms & Equipment Guide* at your fingertips plus give you automated character generation, an animated tour of a 3D village, mapping tools, an inventory system for character gear, XPs etc., all for around \$120.00. Sounds great. It may even work out more *weight* efficient to carry my 486DX plus monitor around with me rather than all those hardbacks!

FASA Corp: The Shadowrun UCAS presidential election results will be announced at GenCon 96 (August) and the sourcebook for that month must be a clue to the likely winner - *Dunkelzahn's Secrets*. Also due out in August is the *BattleTech Fourth Edition* boxed set which promises 48 full-colour playing pieces and two new map sheets, and for Earthdawn a new sourcebook - *Throal: The Dwarf Kingdom*. September's big releases are *Throal Adventures* (ED), *Technical Readout: 3050* (BT).

Palladium Books Inc: July sees the release of the *RiftsworkZ Portfolio*, a limited edition (2000) portfolio of six of John Zeleznik's *Rifts* cover paintings signed and numbered by the artist. One of these covers is from the upcoming *World Book 12: Psyscape* which introduces new psionic OCC's to *Rifts* plus new psi-powers, equipment (guns and armour?), villains, the magic kingdom of Forgefire and adventure ideas. Mind-bending.

Andrew is busy reading through the second edition of *Palladium Fantasy* so we should have that reviewed for you next issue, but in the meantime other second edition releases for this fantasy RPG are *Old Ones* (out now) and *Monsters & Animals* (due August). And in September expect *Nightlands* the second world book for the *Nightbane* horror RPG.

Is it true? Have the folks at **R.Talsorian Games** taken to wearing their underpants on the outside now that they've acquired the *Champions* RPG? RTG are currently working with **Hero Games** to co-publish a new fifth edition of this game of costumed superheroes and villains. Reading between the lines of the press announcement I wouldn't be surprised to see the excellent system from *Dream Park* grafted onto the *Champions* setting.

Steve Jackson Games: announced that they have secured a license to produce *GURPS Discworld* based on the hugely popular series of books by Terry Pratchett. The book, not due until 1997, will be co-authored by the Brit humorist. This should be a treat if it is given the same gorgeous full colour treatment of the recently released *GURPS Goblins*.

White Wolf: have announced that Mark Rein•Hagen is designing a new science fiction roleplaying game line for release in 1997 which will also expand into other media such as war and board games, novels, art books and CD-Roms. Hut!!

Star Trek fans will be interested to hear that White Wolf are going to publish Harlan Ellison's original "unadulterated" script *The City on The Edge of Forever* in September complete with a heated, in-depth, no-holds-barred introduction that discloses all the facts, details and *dirt* of the 25-year feud betwixt Ellison and Roddenberry born of what Harlan describes as a "fatally inept treatment" of his creative work. Fatally inept it may have been, but it was a hugely successful episode. Don't expect Roddenberry to exercise his right of reply.

Wizards of the Coast: From the moment *Magic: The Gathering* exploded the hobby, we at *Realms* have predicted that a *BattleTech* game would soon be "on the cards"; the idea of duelling 'Mechs is too good a concept to miss this treatment. The news is that game design supremo, Richard Garfield, *is* working on the *BattleTech* CCG with a proposed release for the second half of '96. Lock & load!

Unae Scene

Unless you've read this issue of the magazine with your eyes closed you'll be aware that the first *Unae* sourcebook is about to be released. We're all very proud of this achievement and rather keen on having you buy it. If it is not available in your local hobby shop please ask the good people behind the counter to order in the **Wair-Rae Chronicles: Book 1** from *Australian Realms*. Help usher in a new era in Australian game publishing!

Enjoy good gaming, and...

... see you 'round like a D100.

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